

The Man
The Tiger
And the Snake

Ferdinand Reyher

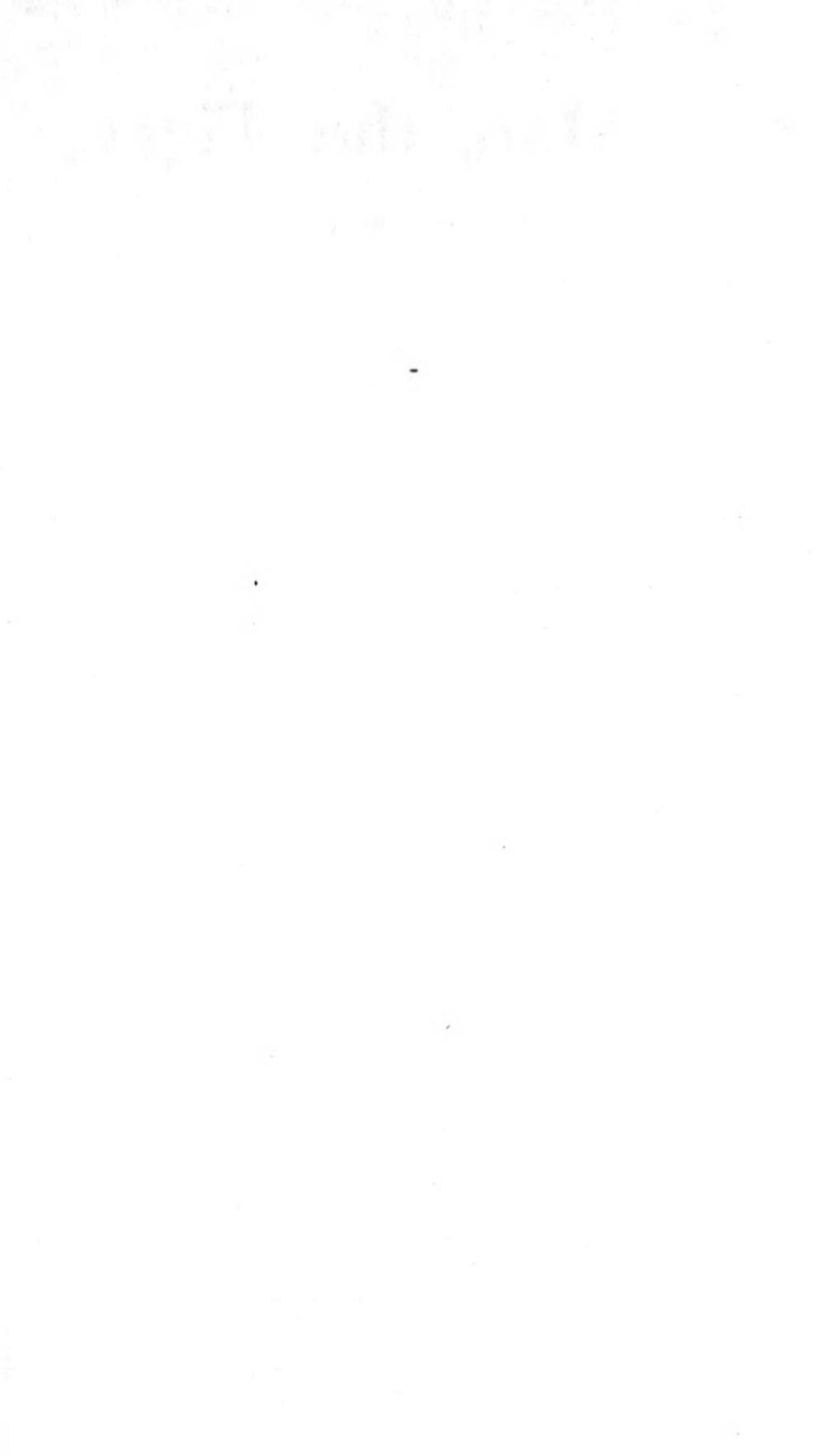
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The Man, the Tiger, and the Snake



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By

Ferdinand Reyher



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To

MY MOTHER

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The Man, the Tiger, and the Snake

There is an old Laos folktale of a hunter who rescued from death a man, a tiger, and a snake, each in turn naturally professing gratitude and in turn pledging aid should the hunter ever need it.

*Now, it so happened, that need befell the hunter, and not being Anglo-Saxon, and consequently not convulsed with squeamishness at the idea of cashing in on favors previously rendered, he went forth without hesitation and quoted to those whom he had befriended—provided, of course, that he understood classical Sanskrit, which he probably didn't—the following verse from the *Hitopadesa*:*

*"That friend only is the true one who is by when trouble comes;
Words are air; a deed talks louder than a solo played on drums."*

Interesting, the working out of that legend, inscribed in ancient temple books and told from immemorial times about the camp fires of obscure tribes in the neglected hinterland bordering India, Cochin-China, and Siam. And if you, happening upon some translation of the story now, imagine that there is a significance in its development and dénouement extending not beyond the remotest jungle gateway touched by the westerner's railroad; that, in other words, the tale is but an example of a peculiar psychology and isolated experience of an

unimportant group, with no universal hold on human nature, read this and chew the cud of that sour reflection, also from the Sanskrit, written, my children, by a bored Brahmin more than three thousand years ago:

*“All is known, digested, tested,
Nothing new is left to learn.”*

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CHAPTER I

STRANGE the fascination a commodity of trade may exercise on a man; a lure aside from the profit involved; or a lure composed of profits of subtler kind. A man may see in his trafficking in potash or in chicle or in zinc ore the accruing benefit to men, and actually pay obeisance to whatever spark of idealism he carries about with him by cornering the market of his specialty. Men still find the same quality of zest in growing wheat or raising tobacco which the old Dutch skippers had in chasing round the world after the scent of pepper and fetching home sesame, kapok, gelatong, or gum copal.

Men arrive at visions of coöperation not infrequently in solitude, following perhaps a jungle track after the exotic future content of a Kansas

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City grocer's bin. Persuade themselves of the sacrament of ivory, or a new fertilizer, or a wood lighter than cork. Where one tempts fever for an orchid, another fills his bones with sickness searching borax or talc, and a third courts sunstroke for cochineal. Manganese, mandioca, copra, hashish, platinum, arsenic, cacao, rattan, indigo, Herve matte, Carnauba wax—the romance of man's pursuits! The interplay of the so-called domestic and exotic!

Commerce, more than art or religion, has been mankind's method of getting acquainted with itself.

For all its accompaniment of rapine, throat-cutting, enslaving, torturing, lying, cheating, greed, it has always had about it, too, a bit of the glint of the Grail. Cooper Comlough's Holy Grail was filled with crude petroleum: preferably one containing from 33 to 35 per cent. gasoline content.

Comlough made the last addition on the sheet of foolscap, proved the figures, and pushed the paper toward the two men who sat across from him at the glass-plated sweep of desk. As they bent over his notes, collating them with strips of ticker-tape and cards scribbled over with stock-

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brokers's notations, he shoved back his chair and went to the window.

A tall man. The first impression was that of an acting rather than a thinking man—one whose gestures would not be superfluous. A closer examination of his features would operate toward a revision of first impressions. His face would have been as interesting to a physiognomist as to a woman, with its plenitude of contradictory elements.

One was conscious of his will-power. It was not appended to a prognathous profile. His chin was no more prominent than the average, and his mouth and lips more than the average in generosity of design and intent. His strength was thrown up into the prominent cheekbones, compact square forehead, and strong nose. It was the lean, tapering prelate type of face, with that ascetic sag of cheek associated with cardinals more frequently than with organizers of oil corporations: tenacious, almost fanatical will; the dogmatic will to hold to a vision through all the adversities men and flesh are heir to. This was the impression given—more quickly than it takes to describe—by a second examination of his face.

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The third examination would be devoted to his eyes. The static theological self-will of forehead, cheekbones, and Richelieu nose was belied by their play and vivacity. Set back under sharp shelving brows, with a tendency to narrow like the beginning of a cowboy's squint, it was difficult to determine their exact color. A variety of brown, probably. Entrenched behind that forehead, cheekbones, and nose they shone like glints of dark gold, and it would have been absurd to imagine that their steadiness could ever be shaken, or that there could be another gaze before which they would fall. Unexpectedly they would be cuddled in humorous crinklings at the corners, like a relenting of that hard upper half of face.

The eyes of a man who is a rationalist even in his ideals; believing in right, acting up to his belief because he is taken with the sensibleness of such procedure. The eyes of a man who has ridden long alone against the glare of sands.

Altogether a man who would accede to the law until it gyved his sense of justice; with no special urge to flatter convention; who would dream and enact his visioning; an essential rebel, where not to rebel meant plodding on in the monotonous

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track of preceding generations. A man of no especial subtlety between the extremes of love and hate, trust and distrust. One to go whole hog on either end.

The foreshortened tip of Manhattan caught little of his gaze out of the nineteenth-story gap in the offices of United Americas Petroleum Consolidated. He only mechanically registered observance of the East River craft crawling out from or into the Bay, skirting Governor's Island or hugging the pierheads along Buttermilk Channel and hiving about the Atlantic Basin. Dimly he felt late spring in the scene, and that the late afternoon violet haze over there was Brooklyn.

"We're not sitting on the top of the world yet, Jim," he said reflectively, without turning. "But my optimism on the effect of my report on Utopian Oil held, despite Updike's congenital pessimism."

"Cynicism, my dear Cooper! Cynicism!" corrected one of the men at the table easily. "Never pessimism. There's a world of difference, really," he said softly.

"Sure . . . of course," murmured Comlough, with the assent of unconviction. "The reports I've made to you alone on the whole Estacado

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tract and the relations which the Utopian and Canassus slices of it bear to our plans will also hold tighter than a drum. You'll see," he said, staring out of the window. "We've thrown Bonsell against the wall so hard that his teeth must have fallen out. It will take more capital and a different sort of backing than they can touch to put the breath of par back into Utopian Oil now." He paused. "Count number one," he said softly; "to shake up the old serpent of a street down there from the Battery to Thibet . . . eventually!"

He pressed his finger tips with a strained lightness against the broad pane of glass.

"Somewhere toward the end of this pleasant month of May," he continued, his voice held low, "we shall be in absolute control of the greatest oil and general industrial project in the southwest; and, in time—who knows?—of the greatest in the world!"

Behind him, as he stood staring contemplatively out on the Bay and Brooklyn, seeing them not as themselves but as an illimitable, desolate Texan and New Mexican tract, the two men at the table spread papers from a folder. There were four full pages cut from different newspapers, a sheaf of

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clippings from financial journals and an illustrated article out of the Saturday industrial section of an evening paper. The world and its investors and speculators had been reading these reports of Comlough's on the exploitation of the great tract known as Utopian Acres at breakfast, lunches, and luncheons and dinners, in subways and in limousines, going to and from offices for more than a week. They had consequently become instructed upon the financial status and intentions of the promoters of Utopian Oil, whose stocks ten days ago, when the flotation of a new issue to increase the capitalization to \$10,000,000 was announced, had been quoted round 47 and 48, and that day, reaching what represented the bedrock value of the company's assets, been offered at less than 6, and no buyers.

His reports had been made public on the eve of a campaign to drive Utopian skywards. Based upon two years of investigation of the territory involved, his word was authoritative, and particularly so because there was no evidence of any special interest of his own in the standing of Utopian stocks. Two weeks before, in coöperation with W. E. Oller, secretary of the Texan Oil

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Investors' Society, he had sent out of Wichita Falls his first public statement. It was a generalization to the effect that of between two and three hundred companies organized in the *developed* district nearest the Utopian Acres section, only six paid dividends, and of this number not more than one could liquidate to-day at par, dividends already paid out included. It was from this general examination that Comlough's reports, now issued from New York, had passed to the particular—to Utopian Oil.

His reports were crisp, scientific, effective. There was nothing petulant or petty in them. They were detached in tone even where they attacked. He bore himself in public print like a man whose only purpose in "riding" Utopian Oil or any corporation, his own included, was that of the square principled industrial organizer in the cause of honest enterprise *versus* dishonest promotion. But he did have a nearer and more material interest in Utopian Oil.

As president of United Americas Petroleum Consolidated, sturdiest of the younger and independent oils, he controlled over a million acres in South America, Mexico, and the United States. Produc-

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ing, refining, and marketing on a scale which made him the leader among the younger oil men, there was more in him than a desire for just success and the accumulation of wealth—an elaborate sense of industrial adventure.

As to most men of his type, the opportunity for which he had been waiting came, because, again like men of his type, he had unconsciously been creating that opportunity.

Across the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plain of Texas, he acquired a vast, irregular tract between the Colorado River in the so-called Puma Hills of western Texas, and the Pecos River in New Mexico. It was north of the Edwards Plateau, where some of the large companies were sinking test wells. Months upon months, with three picked engineers and two of the best geologists of the Mid-Continent field, he had packed over the land until he knew it as well as he knew Fifth Avenue. Better. He had found seepages of high-grade oil, asphalt and live oil springs. In an out-of-the-way corner he had drilled a successful well, and shut it down again. Four other secret wells, being drilled at widely separated spots, were revealing extraordinary logs.

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But development only on a scale hardly ever before attempted was possible there. The physical difficulties of producing oil were only incidental to the almost insurmountable difficulties of beginning even the humblest industrial operations in a territory where every transportation, production, and living facility had first to be created or imported. Railroads had to be built; reservoirs, pipe lines, refineries, gas and steel storage tanks, pumping and compounding stations; the hydraulic potentialities of the streams between the Colorado and the Pecos to be transformed into working power.

A general industrial development which would open up a wilderness. It was a vision which he seemed to have been dreaming all his life. To achieve that vision was the thing he wanted more than he had wanted any save one other certain thing, which had, however, escaped him. As he stood, looking out of the window, he thought of Marcia Nolan—Lynn—now, and he shook his head with involuntary briskness to free his mind of her picture.

He had come back to Broadway and Exchange Place. He had cornered men; all sorts of them; his own associates and directors; consulting engineers,

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and the big moneyed men upon whom, in the last analysis, operations of the magnitude he contemplated were dependent. In their own offices he had made them see that untouched expanse of oil land as vividly as he saw it: humming with activity; the reservoir of a new factor in the oil world, which would make him a power throughout the whole world; a dominion where the experience and realizations he had gained through years of shoulder-to-shoulder work in the oil fields with every variety of man, bringing him understanding of the stark forces of labor in all its phases, would be translated into a new sort of program of toil which would be more than a candle gleam in a troubled world, would be a searchlight, rather, flashing out practical solutions of the tangle of modern industry. A program with more in it than company insurance for employees, decent company housing, club rooms and stores, profit- and stock-sharing privileges.

There was in his mind the determination to work even more strenuously at getting mankind out of men than oil out of the earth. He had pondered over the meaning of the Wheatland Hop Riots, the Phoenix uprising, the lumber and longshoremen and Brotherhood strikes; over the organization of

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such movements as the Grangers, the Non-Partisan League, the I. W. W., the Farmers' Alliance, and European coöperative societies, until he had come to the conclusion, ahead of most other prominent industrial figures, that the preservation of Americanism and the progress of the world alike, called for something different than the disastrous revolution-breeding Bourbonism of a hysterical attorney general, and an Alexander III secret service.

The sour, filthy bunkhouses, the hire-and-fire policy, the seasonal call and the unseasonal rejection of the migratory labor casuals—he knew well enough from first hand witnessing what that led to; and in consequence he dreamed a dream of a new order. It fitted in his mind like a perfect mechanism. There was nothing dead about this plan of his. It lived already, down to the very sites throughout the country for his experimenting stations for the perfection of oil-using engines, to the very publicity campaign planned on such an unprecedented scale that it was in reality the propaganda of a new social and industrial experiment.

If!—

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There were two *ifs*.

The tract he held was traversed in two places by other holdings—the Utopian Acres, so-called, and the Canassus tract of more than 150,000 acres, owned by the Texan Improvement and Petroleum Corporation. These two holdings, totaling nearly four hundred thousand acres, had been recently bought in at less than fifty cents an acre for ambiguous and flash promotion advertising purposes in connection with a restricted acreage in Burk-burnett and a dozen moribund wells.

He needed both holdings to secure the homogeneity of his own tract and to carry out plans involving railroading and water-power problems. Furthermore, he required the intact control of the entire territory in order to secure loans from the two men who would be inclined to give them to him, Hargreaves and Colonel Maurice.

Utopian Oil, formed originally by the grace of that loophole in Texas statutes permitting the organization of practically unlicensed and unrestricted "joint stock associations," in which outside stockholders have little protection against the promoters, had by accident and not through the good intentions of its officers, brought in two good

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wells in a shallow section. Enough to secure the reincorporation of the concern in the stricter State of New York, and an increase of the capitalization from a million to two and a half millions. Control was retained by a half-dozen men with Alexander Bonsell, of his kind the shrewdest along the Curb, at their head. Things went along quietly, streamers of rosy promises issuing from the offices of Utopian Oil. Overcome with their initial luck the promoters made some honest attempts to bring in other wells, without success. The stock was still maintaining its prestige; going higher daily, in fact, on the receding glory of those two chance wells, but Bonsell and the others foresaw the time when promises would fail to bolster up their stock; when the market would learn what they already knew: that the two wells were falling off daily with the end in sight. They did the obvious and ever-successful thing: they bought in five decadent wells at ruinous prices, and an enormous tract in another part of Texas, which in an advertising circular would have an air of being smack in the center of the most proved of proved oil ground. In the last week of April the company announced thereupon a second increase of capital-

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ization and another issue of stock, bringing it up to ten million dollars.

Before this resplendent new issue really arrived, Comlough's reports sent the previous stock toppling, and the only new shares distributed were those acquired by the inner ring.

He knew that every financial move he had made from the day he published his first attack on Utopian had been scrutinized. He pictured Alexander Bonsell, tall, untidily dressed, cadaverous, twitching his cheek muscles, wrapping and unwrapping his lengthy legs round his chair and morosely submitting to the hate which must be gnawing at him. He would be in the state of mind where he would rather blow up the building in which Utopian Oil had its offices than permit Comlough to touch a single share of the stock for his gain. Neither could he operate through dummies. The market was dead, so far as Utopian Oil was concerned. With all the possibilities of development, which he had freely admitted in his published statements, the capital required to undertake such development of a tract which was virtually outside the pale of all labor, railroad, and disbursing centers, was something entirely be-

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yond the resources of the original promoters, and a proposition having no impelling appeal to interests who had less remote projects to absorb what ready money was procurable. Consequently attempts by anyone, known or unknown, to purchase the discredited stock in bulk would be regarded with instant suspicion. The faintest manifestation of any direct interest of his own in it, would, of course, send it rocketing again and invalidate every syllable of his reports.

Behind him Aiken tapped his finger nails with a pencil.

“We’ve got to work out a way to get in behind Aleck Bonsell, or buy him out,” he said.

“Buy out Aleck Bonsell?” questioned Updike, raising his eyebrows. “Now—Jim! How unique of you!” he said, with his cynical smile.

“That’s what Colonel Maurice will tell you to-night, Cooper.”

Aiken lifted his voice to draw the attention of the motionless figure at the window.

“‘Buy ‘em out!’ That’s Maurice’s credo,” said Updike. “I’m with Cooper on this question, however. I prefer that we handle this, rather than Maurice. I appreciate the handsome old gentle-

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man's good will and backing on occasions; but as a daily mentor I prefer to meet the Colonel as a fellow club member on dull evenings."

"Suppose we can't lay hands on enough Utopian to jolt the rest of it out of Aleck's hands? Suppose none of his crowd will let go in the next three weeks?"

"Dear Jim, we can't sail 'twixt sea and moon on suppositions," commented Updike dryly. "Or do you really suppose the frailty of human flesh and the yearning for lump sums of ready cash have both made detours round all of Bonsell's regiment —Cann, McAleeman, Huffaker, Bainbridge—Bainbridge particularly?"

"I do. Bonsell picks stickers."

"Tommyrot!" snapped Updike. His little cynical smile immediately replaced the momentary tautness of his thin, closed lips. "You take an incorrigibly romantic view of life, James," he said lightly. "You can get to anybody outside of the ungodly few whose immediate desires are unquotable in terms of financial urgency."

"That's Maurice's attitude or credo, as you call it."

"Not at all, not at all," corrected Updike, a

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trifle grieved. "The Colonel holds that there is no one whose immediate desires are not to be reduced to figures of instantaneous pecuniary yearning, little or big. I make a few, as I say, ungodly exceptions. An important difference," insisted Updike meticulously.

"Aleck Bonsell?"

"In this case, decidedly so. Aleck would blow up Nassau Street if he could be sure of locating our friend Mr. Comlough somewhere in the center of the upheaval. But give the others two or three weeks to cool off and we should be able to get round them. Huffaker or Bainbridge, for instance. Just give us their block of stock to dump like a can of ashes, and see what would happen to the others. Why, man, you could go out there with a pocket full of dimes and buy up the whole cake round Bonsell's slice."

Aiken leaned back, absently studying the papers before him.

"All right," he said meditatively; "but when all is said, and particularly when all is done, I think we'll have been wiser to follow the Maurice axiom, and bring them out. When we do get control, how do you expect us ever to live down this smoking

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them out in the press and then running round to the back door to sneak in ourselves?"

Comlough turned from the window.

"That is an important point, Jim," he said seriously; "but you'll see in time how any other course was impossible. I could have waited, for example, until they had scattered all their stock; played the game with them clean through and then gone out and fought them in the open market, collected proxies and skimped and scamped invaluable time away in a two-by-two fight in which shoals of small fry would have been crushed. Buying them out at their own figure was, of course, never to be thought of. It may seem sophistry, but I never denied the presence of oil on their tract. I merely made matters clear. Utopian capitalized at ten millions was dressed up about a thousand times bigger than Bonsell believed his stock was worth. He had no idea of developing it for the stockholders because, first of all, he had put what, with his lack of knowledge of the sort of land he held, was a blown-up figure on his company for stock-issuing purposes. He's not an oil man—he's a bond shark. He hadn't an idea of what he'd be up against in developing Utopian Acres in case

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he had another lucky windfall, and struck oil again in the Estacado, with the toughest shale and deepest strata to puncture in the State. When I met that expert of theirs, Kilcairn, out there he was hunting for moonshine, and the investigations he made in that field are exactly as much as Bonsell and his crowd know about the oil situation. It's the same thing with Mangin, Searles, Levy, and that cluster of fantastic highbinders of the Texan Improvement Company."

He spread both hands on the table over the clippings and leaned toward the two men.

"Oil to me, boys, is a little more than oil, really. Oil's got pretty darn near a personality to me; just as the men actually working in it have; as all working men have. I never go through the streets on ash day—I actually don't!—that I don't say to myself the time will come when we'll laugh at the memory of having pestered ourselves with all that mess: cinders, dust, shoveling, forfeited space, waste, and inefficiency. The time when our apartment-houses and office buildings will be heated by oil furnaces, cutting the gangs we need to heat them now into a few men and no dirt. I don't look out of that window on those tugs and liners

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coming in or going out of the Bay, without thinking two thousand merchant vessels, eight million tons of shipping, burning oil to-day! The *Leviathan* may be out there now. She burns six thousand tons a round trip. That takes three or four days and nights to shovel into her. And we could bunker her with oil in a day without getting in the way of her cargo loading! I hardly ever see an engine-boiler any more, from a sixty-five hundred horse-power Hotchkiss-Duval to a little Dressel, that I don't mentally convert it into an oil consumer, and think of the time when boats bigger than the coming *Moltke* will go steaming out with one-tenth of the *Leviathan's* present crew of firemen, ash handlers, and coal passers, and a cruising radius five times as great on an oil supply taking up less space than her coal now.

"I have respect for a commodity running six million autos, or whatever the figures are—something like that—lighting farms, heating steel forges and metal-treating and annealing furnaces; supplying the juice for almost everything that runs, from a tractor kicking up a smooth shaving of the Mississippi Valley to one of those planes droning out from Governor's Island at a hundred

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and fifty an hour. The man behind that commodity is in a game that's shoving up existence and business and methods of work. I look at oil differently, I presume to say, than Bonsell and his crowd, or Mangin and his; and as long as our Blue Sky laws and other dulcet inducements to crook promoters are what they are, I'm going to bust through in my way just as I'm doing now, and hang the things men think and say of me!"

CHAPTER II

A touch of that tranquillity which belongs peculiarly to May seemed even to have descended upon Broadway. Comlough threw his light overcoat on the rear seat of the automobile which was waiting for him.

"Go round to the Commercial Trust, Tom; I'm going to stretch my legs and sniff a bit of May-time."

As he passed the Clinton Loan and Trust Company he heard his name called. From a touring car standing by the curb in front of the bank a woman was waving to him. He went quickly to her, hat doffed, hand outstretched; with that queer heady tenderness with which the presence of Marcia Nolan always filled him. Not even after seven years could he quite reconcile himself to the fact that she was Marcia Lynn.

"So it has come to this, Cooper—street meetings!" she exclaimed, her eyes alive with pleasure.

"Marcia! My, but I'm glad to see you!" he said.

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It was fine when he was standing talking to her; but it was like taking a cold plunge in icy weather to get to that point.

“Glad? Tut-tut, forswear not thy soul!” she laughed. “No good-bye when you departed; no little hello in the times you came back, and just one stingy card from Texas or one of those melodramatic states—just one stingy card, most reverend signor! Why, for all I knew Cooper Comlough might have become a citizen of Patagonia. Tell me, Cooper, are you a citizen of Patagonia now?”

Usually self-possessed, almost grave, for the last several years Marcia greeted him with these half-reproachful railleries. It made it much easier for him, being a man who had had not a few occasions to find refuge in humor when he thought of her. But something in her manner at times puzzled him.

“You know what corking friends the pen and I are,” he answered now. “You’re right, though, I am part ruffian for not having written.”

“Complete ruffian, Cooper! Evans heard you were back over a week ago. I was in Hempstead until this morning getting the house ready. But

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I knew, too, when all those articles of yours came out. Didn't you use a pen on them, Cooper?" she asked slyly. "Stenographer, I suppose. The English was—well, stenographic, in some places," she poked at him. "Sort of walking round, hair rumpled, what-word-next, forceful-speech English!"

"Dry-as-dust stuff," he apologized, with a faint twinge of author's pride. "Didn't dream you'd ever get far enough in it to find the mistakes."

"But I did!" she reproved. Her eyes became serious, and deep, giving her face that wise dignity he loved. "And you know I did. Tell me—your work means a lot to you, doesn't it? I mean outside of the money involved. You sort of dream things in the oil industry the way some men dream things in pictures, in social reform, or in steel and ships?"

His fingers tightened on the brim of his hat.

"Yes," he said, almost softly; and then he suddenly wanted to get away.

Her next words held him there.

"Tell me—your work meaning much to you—you see, I have grown curious as to what goes on in the minds of men—" interrupting herself

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lightly, and yet as though suddenly confused, “—this work of yours, was it something which could be shared; by a woman, for example?”

The question seared him. The knuckles over the brim of his hat were white from the grip with which he held it. He hardly dared look at her. When he did she was not looking at him. He saw, too, that she was not even thinking of him directly; that, somehow, whatever he answered would be no answer to her question at all. Yet he wanted desperately to get away; but he replied.

“Yes,” he said softly. He thought the set of her chin was a trifle firmer; that the point of it came a trifle higher as he answered thus: “Yes.”

Exquisitely groomed, with the air of wearing beautiful simple things for no love of dress, but as the unconsciously appropriate garbing of the beautiful simple spirit which was Marcia Nolan—Lynn—herself; a silken strand of hair escaped from under her toque with willful fetchingness; the straight fine nose; the firm lips with that faintest crook at the left corner of soft, perceiving humor; her eyes, blend of grey and turquoise, alight with brave, human understanding. She was the epitome of all desirable things in life for him; in a

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way, the end of life; and for him, the one thing which life could not bring. Always this reverent appraisal of her, and the reflection of big defeat in having lost her, flashed through his mind when she stood before him. Something in her manner, perhaps the strange question she had asked him, to-day sharpened the outlines of this commingled inner and outer picture of her. However, the sense of loss which she always gave him had increased so greatly in recent years that he had avoided her and Lynn himself, who had been his closest friend.

“How are little Marcia and the boy—and Evans?” he asked abruptly, to break that transitory tenseness between them, and also to get round to a point of departure.

“The children are splendid, Cooper,” she answered, meeting his gaze tranquilly. “You must come to see them, if not us. They’re always asking for you. I’m a little worried about Evans. He’s been working so hard lately it’s telling on his nerves. I have been trying to carry him off to Knolynn for a spell and had it all arranged last week when something began to happen to the market. Then I came in to take him away to-day, and this afternoon he telephoned off again.

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I am waiting now to learn the reason why, or die."

Evans Lynn was a vice-president of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company. It was long after banking hours, and when she first called to him Comlough had not associated the well-known building with Evans.

"Didn't know the market ever affected him," he laughed. "Being a banking officer has the call over the developing game—keeps you out of temptation and worry. The worst those fellows have to do is sweat over a new-style safety vault or a lost fraction. The Clinton Trust must have loaned money to Russia—that's about the only legitimate worry I can credit to Evans."

She smiled; but he detected the shadow of anxiety in her smile.

"I—don't know what it is—but he's quite worried lately."

"Evans wouldn't want you to worry about it, Marcia."

"That's it—" she stopped, as though to check the words, and then smiled as though to erase them now that she had unthinkingly spoken them. But the two words, "That's it!" came as an echo

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to the question she had put a little while before to him, and her smile told Comlough many things. Endowed with an intelligence inferior to none of which he knew, among either men or women, she had tried in the first years of her marriage to use it on terms of mental equality with her husband. How she had failed, Comlough did not know; but he knew now that she had failed. She had become what ages of women had become before her and for some time yet will continue to become—"beloved wives" and "beloved mothers"—knowing less of their husbands and men children outside their homes than casual companions might learn casually. The conventions of Lynn and her own family had borne her down. But the two words of hurt agreement to Comlough's remark that Lynn would not wish her to worry about his business affairs, the smile with which she sought to delete them, the question she had asked him—"This work of yours, was it something which could be shared, by a woman, for example?"—indicated that all her old intellectual longing and rebellion was still alive within her; too vital to be suppressed utterly. For a moment he had the embarrassment of spying on her privacy.

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He glanced at the bank clock. Quarter of six! He extended his hand.

"I'd like to wait for Evans; but you'll excuse me, won't you, Marcia? I've got a three- or four-hour session with Hargreaves and Colonel Maurice, and I'm due at the Commercial Trust to pick them up."

"But can't we have dinner together? I think Evans will want to stay downtown."

"No end of sorry, Marcia—but I'm slated to go up to Hargreave's."

"Earnest laborer!" she laughed. "Promise you will come up some night soon. Call up Evans, won't you, Cooper? Find out when he will have time to grace his home again for dinner. Promise—for if you don't, I promise I will come for you myself!"

He laughed, shook hands, promised, and with a greeting of love to her children, hurried off.

Again, as upon countless previous occasions he took a kind of spiritual inventory of himself, and again confronted with old puzzlement the question: Why had he failed where Lynn succeeded? Love wasn't luck; never where a woman like Marcia was concerned. He had known her longer than Lynn, in fact. Through their college years they had

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divided equally her favor. Through their subsequent years in a graduate mining school, on the one hand, and law school, on the other, she had evinced no partiality. Then he had spent two years' apprenticeship in the Great Superior Copper Mine, while Lynn was in Buenos Aires for his uncle's bank, and she was in Europe. Then—she had refused him. A year later her engagement to Lynn was announced; another year later, and they were married.

Just in what had he been lacking? It was not money. The prospects and connections of Lynn and himself were equal, and monetary considerations would never have influenced her. Lynn was handsome, devilish handsome, in fact; with that air of his of breeding and of stepping full-grown from a line of forefathers who had also been darkly, suavely handsome devotees of good form. He had always had a fascination for women; unselfishly enough Comlough had admitted this of his classmate and roommate in days when it meant more to a youth's pride than it could possibly mean to a man who had learned pretty generally to recast old values. Only still, a little wisfully, he felt cheated that Marcia, too, had been drawn by Lynn's

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fascination, even while he wondered whether this were true. The fact remained, no less hurting than on the day he had first learned it definitely, Marcia Nolan had preferred Evans Lynn to Cooper Comlough.

He wasted no thoughts wondering what business difficulties were worrying Lynn at the moment.

The Terry shelf clock in Hargreave's library gave a single deep chime for half-past eleven as Comlough said good-night to the banker. He paused on the sidewalk to light a cigarette. The night was lovely May incarnate; matched to the spring burgeoning within himself. Hargreaves and Maurice would back him! In this day and age, more than ever, the great loans are given more upon personality than upon collateral. Personality still remains the highest gilt-edge security procurable. This is right; it is human and fundamental.

He threw back his head and breathed deeply. He had persuaded Colonel Maurice, customarily as cold as his snow-white moustache and his ice-blue eyes, to relinquish for once his pet tactic: "Buy 'em out, sir!" despite the fact that the

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Colonel insisted that Comlough was "a young man with ideas but an aversion for simple direct means of carrying them out, like all young men!"

"Handle it yourself, then, Comlough. Keep our names out of it," said Colonel Maurice; "but if you don't get control of the whole Estacado by your methods before June," he insisted, as he had said he would on a previous occasion, "we shall take it over, to do it our way, or not at all."

Of Comlough's industrial reorganization program Hargreave said:

"It's been attempted in a measure in established plants, Comlough. Never heard of anybody going out into the wilds with notions like that to chop Utopia out of the woods after first chopping it out of the market. But go to it. Maybe you've hit on a remedy for to-morrow's troubles. Try it hard."

Comlough had been indifferently conscious of footsteps behind him. He half turned as they sounded sharply beside him. His arm was gripped.

"Cooper!" The familiar, modulated voice startled him.

"Why—hello—Evans! Where'd you drop from?"

"Waiting for you."

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In the radiance of an arc light the aristocratic face of Lynn showed dark rings under his eyes. Comlough thought his lips twitched.

“Waiting for me?”

“Marcia said she met you, and that you would be at Hargreave’s.”

“Oh—” Comlough was mystified. Self-possession was the essence of Lynn; but the urbanity of the man had been displaced by some strange tensity which he could control only imperfectly.

“Come down to the University Club—or can we go to your place?” Lynn talked rapidly. “I must talk to you.”

“My place—of course. But, man, what’s the matter?”

Lynn’s eyes wavered.

“Lots of trouble,” he said hoarsely, with a queer gulp.

What Marcia had said about Lynn’s nervousness—business troubles and refusal to leave New York with her—came back to him. They reached Fifth Avenue. He signaled a taxi.

“Tell me about it,” he said, as the machine got on its way.

“I—wait till we get to your place,” Lynn an-

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swered. After a pause he added, almost in a whisper: "Only repeat this to yourself, Cooper—you've got to help me, old man; you've got to help me!"

Exchange of commonplaces was out of key. Unable to talk of the thing dominant in the other's mind, Comlough said nothing. Nor did Lynn, rigid on the seat beside him, say anything further.

They went immediately to Comlough's study. He waved Ochia, his Jap boy, out of the room, and pushed a deep chair for Lynn to the refectory table jutting into the bay window. He drew the curtains and set out a bottle of Scotch and a glass. Lynn aroused a pulse of old admiration in Comlough by rejecting the drink with a curt wave of his hand, when it was obvious that he needed one badly.

"Now then, Evans."

Lynn stared at a Dutch plaque paperweight. Finally he lifted his eyes to Comlough's. His face was blanched.

"Cooper—I've ruined myself—disgraced—Marcia and my children," he said unemotionally.

Comlough rose, automatically, because for a second he did not comprehend. Then, strangely,

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resentment scorched his instinctive sympathy for the man before him. Why had he dragged in Marcia's name? Just as curious, but saner, was the reflection which immediately ousted his resentment.

Disgrace Marcia Nolan?—Her own name framed itself in his mind as he visualized her.—No, that was something no man could do. Disgrace himself, perhaps; disgrace some others, too, perhaps—but *her*? No man, husband or other, had that power over her. He settled back in his chair and scrutinized the pale, handsome man opposite him, while Lynn labored to put into words the calamity he faced.

“I sunk a million dollars—smashed on the street,” said Lynn, trying to control his twitching dry lips. “Smashed!”

He stopped as though waiting either for an exclamation of amazement or sympathy from Comlough. The latter failed to understand at once. A million dollars was, of course, a million dollars; but the mental estimate he made of Lynn's resources plus Marcia's money was between two and three million dollars. And then in a flash the significance of a man in Lynn's bank position ventur-

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ing in what must have been financial wild-catting gave him a mental jolt.

“Speculating! But man, I don’t understand——”

“The day before the Armistice I was worth a potential six or seven million dollars,” said Lynn grimly. “A week after the Armistice I would have cashed in. The end of the war was the end of peace for me.”

It was at this point that Lynn reached for the whisky. He rose to pour it, and sat down again, as though his joints had gone stiff. He moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue after the drink.

“But still, a million ought not—” began Comlough, thinking again of Lynn’s resources.

“One million—that—was not mine!” he said hoarsely.

Marcia’s money! Comlough leaned forward.

“It belonged—to——”

“To the bank.”

Comlough’s breath caught.

“To the bank!—Evans—to the bank?”

“Yes. Mine and Marcia’s went—long ago. This was—a chance of a thousand years to get it back—and more—and I got jammed.”

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Comlough emitted an inaudible breath of relief. At least the law had not yet gripped Marcia's husband.

"It meant—getting back Marcia's chance for happiness," said Lynn weakly, avoiding his eye.

Comlough thrust out his hand as though to press back Lynn's words.

"Evans, let me tell you something," he said sharply, anger overcoming his repugnance of mentioning Marcia at this time. "You're wrong there. A woman like Marcia doesn't risk her happiness on money. Then," he added grimly, "you can't found happiness on any such procedure as that."

Lynn bit his lips. Comlough eyed him steadily.

"On what did you stick it?" he asked quietly.

Lynn's eyes met his in a long hypnotic stare.

"On—on Utopian Oil!" he said slowly.

Comlough sat forward with a start and an ejaculation.

"On what?"

"Yes—on what!" Lynn emitted a tragic laugh. "On Utopian Oil which you wrecked to hell with your newspaper reports! On Utopian Oil, Cooper Comlough! On Utopian Oil!"

There was a long silence in the cozy, soft-lighted

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room, as the two men subsided into their chairs again, eying each other as though they were strangers. Lynn's eyes broke under the increasing steadiness of Comlough's; his gaze wandered to a pale rose and opal sun scene of Sorolla's on the wall, and continued until it struck the whisky bottle on the table. Mechanically he leaned sideways and poured himself a second drink. He had gulped it down before Comlough spoke. Strangely enough he was not thinking of Marcia at all now; only of the broken friend across the table, who had already something of the aspect of being hunted. Utopian Oil! That was weirdly fateful.

"Evans," he said, almost gently, "this is mighty strange—mighty."

Something savage flared in the other man's eyes.

"You've got to help me out, Cooper! Why—Marcia—"

Comlough checked him with a curt gesture. Repugnance bitter as gall and deeper than before filled him at this new attempt to drag in Marcia. It was treachery, to put it mildly and sardonically, to the code of decent form on the part of a man whose religion and that of his fathers had been good form.

"You've got to help me, Cooper!" repeated

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Lynn, alarmed at Comlough's gesture. "I'll pay it back with interest."

Comlough's eyes fastened on the Dutch plaque. Friends, old friends; classmates, roommates; old pals—invisibly united in their mutual love for Marcia, and at this moment impassably divided by just that, too. But he was no man to retire into a niche of righteousness when his help was asked. The criminality of Lynn's act made the demand on his assistance more imperative, if anything. But the irony of the situation in which he was asked to help a man whom he had been indirectly responsible for ruining had many complications. Now, in the first place to tell Lynn the real reason of his attacks on Utopian Oil without revealing the secrets of his impending operations in Texas and the confidence of the men associated with him—could he do it? He also had a feeling of squeamishness in accepting this offer of Fate to gain control of Utopian Oil, through the misfortune of his friend. Yet, obviously, he could not disregard the chance, merely because it seemed to identify willingness to help Lynn with self-interest. The other shifted under the delay. Comlough met his worried gaze again.

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“But why—why on Utopian Oil?” he asked, to gain time for his thoughts to work themselves out.

Lynn hesitated.

“McAleeman, Huffaker, and Bainbridge were in the original crowd,” he said, looking at the whisky bottle. “Bainbridge sees, or thinks he does, the trend of prohibition. He was interested in building the Moro Castle Hotel in Havana, and took McAleeman and Huffaker in with him.”

Comlough mentally placed them in turn. McAleeman, a slippery Scot, with a washed-out cheek, a fishy eye and a rusty moustache; Bainbridge, one of the spat-and-cane sporting, chorus-man-tailored market grafters, with a dingy office in Water Street; Huffaker, a man with a magnetic eye but a terra cotta complexion and a ratty smile. A bad trio for the vice-president of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company to meet up with! When the mighty tumble, reflected Comlough, verily they roll into strange companions.

“They needed cash, oceans of it,” Lynn spoke with matter-of-factness now. “McAleeman—well, he knew I had been speculating and also learned that I was down to bed rock. He had me in an awkward position, although no specific

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intimation of it was ever mentioned by him. He just knew. And he knew I knew he knew. . . . I loaned them nine hundred thousand dollars in three lots on their holdings of Utopian."

Comlough whistled softly.

"In effect, I had bought them—if they went up. McAleeman gave me Bonsell's game in detail. It looked—just what it was before you stepped in—a sure thing. I knew it was shady; but I was desperate. I had obligations to meet which were going to show me up as though a searchlight were put on me—if I didn't. I was crazy—beyond thought of honesty, Cooper. Now—" he paused and inhaled deeply. "There's a state examination to-morrow and on Friday the directors' meeting. That's the situation in a nutshell."

As he listened, the other's agony eating into him, Comlough's mind involuntarily hearkened back.

"Marcia's money—she knew you were using it?"

The question took Lynn by surprise.

"No."

Again an impossible silence came between them. Comlough wanted to get out—to get into the air, because the oppression of the room was intolerable. He would help Lynn, of course; incidentally, it

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would practically give him control of Utopian, but at a price much higher than he had intended to pay for it. He was a little glad of this. He did not want to have his assistance to Lynn—and Marcia—confused too crassly with business motives. He was not thinking of business, moreover, because only two facts throbbed in his mind: Lynn ousted from the bank—disgraced! and Marcia beggared—Marcia beggared! She must get her money back. He got a mental grip on himself, asking another question to gain time.

“What are you going to do—stripped of everything you and Marcia have, and in debt?”

Lynn’s pale face grew paler; his lips moved and his eyes wandered with a stark look in them about the room, finding nothing strong enough to hold them until they met Comlough’s.

“That—that I can face, Cooper—and somehow—slave out of it into daylight again. But disgrace—prison—that’s something I can’t face.”

Comlough hesitated for a second, then he picked up pencil and pad. Lynn’s recent betrayal of the confidence which the Clinton Loan and Trust Company reposed in him had not weakened his faith in Lynn’s sense of personal obligation to him-

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self. If anything, Lynn must have learned his bitter lesson.

“Utopian was originally capitalized at a million, half preferred, non-voting. Three hundred and fifty thousand of the common was issued and control divided up among Bonsell, Cann, Bainbridge, McAleeman, Huffaker, and an engineer named Kilcairn. Bonsell took fifty thousand, Cann thirty-five, Bainbridge, McAleeman, and Huffaker each twenty-five, and Kilcairn twenty. When it was reincorporated in New York they made the old common convertible at one to three of the new and divided up control in the same proportion. After they got their Estacado tract and announced the new ten-million capitalization they made the second common convertible at one to five of the third. So Bonsell holds seven hundred and fifty thousand; Cann, five hundred and twenty-five; Bainbridge, McAleeman, and Huffaker three hundred and seventy-five apiece, and Kilcairn three hundred thousand. Correct?”

“That is right,” said Lynn, wondering what this detailed review of the inner finances of Utopian meant to Comlough.

“You hold Bainbridge, McAleeman, and Huff-

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aker's blocks: one million, a hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars' worth. Against you are, Bonsell and Cann, who will stick with him, with a block of a million, two hundred and seventy-five thousand. Isn't that so?"

"Kilcairn?" said Lynn involuntarily.

"Exactly. Kilcairn with his lot of three hundred thousand holds the whip. But—" Comlough looked meaningfully at Lynn—"I know something that even Bonsell doesn't. I know where Kilcairn is. I can get his share with no more trouble than a telegram. And his with yours—"

"With mine?"

"Yes—I'm going to give you what you paid for it."

"You—*you* want that stuff!" exclaimed Lynn.

"You will have the money to return to the bank to-morrow morning and I'll have your stock. With Kilcairn's it will give me what I have to have—the majority holding. This will be turned over for a nominal bit of United Americas Petroleum, which will manage the thing as it sees fit."

A faint flush poured into Lynn's pale cheeks.

"Then you—you did me—us—up brown for your game?" he demanded excitedly, gripping the

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table. The flush went out of his cheeks. He controlled himself. "What a coincidence!" he said.

Comlough disregarded his manner, thinking it in passing as natural enough in the circumstances, and went into details. He told Lynn of his proposed project in the Estacado, and explained why the Utopian and Canassus slices of it were important to him; even told his old friend that upon securing the complete control of the Estacado depended the loans he must have from Hargreave and Colonel Maurice. He outlined his contemplated campaign against the Texan Improvement and Oil Company, and enlisted Lynn's aid for two purposes—first, to get control of that organization, and second, as the first step in Lynn's own financial rehabilitation.

Part of the Llano Estacado was excellent, if remote, range country. Lynn, through a neutral broker, could announce to Mangin of Texan Improvement that big stock-breeding interests had purchased the depreciated Utopian, not for oil but for range purposes, and suggest that the same interests were in the market for further acreage in the same territory. Texan Improvement stock being then in the same proximity to zero that

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Utopian was now, it would not take Mangin more than a couple of thoughts to leap to the fly.

So Comlough discussed confidential matters pertaining to the oil operations of United Americas Petroleum Consolidated with Lynn, in an easy, chatty way; glad, in fact, to talk over his plans intimately with his old friend; deeply glad of the opportunity of doing a good turn for him, both for Lynn's own sake and old friendship, as well as for Marcia's. Talked conversationally, casually of things vital in his project of things, to set Lynn utterly at rest with himself again and reestablish him with all his old self-respect in their old comradeship and candor. He told of developments in the Lake Maracaibo Basin, pending Venezuelan concessions in Perija and the districts of Paez and Miranda; of projects along the Magdalena. He told of the single remaining difficulty—nothing really to speak of—after he had gained control of Utopian and the Canassus tract, in starting operations on the Estacado. The transference or rescinding of a franchise held by a railroad man named Porter, the president of a short, decrepit road, the Long Horn and Lone Star, which held certain rights of way it had never built on, but

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which were essential to Comlough's transportation plans. There would be no trouble about Porter. He was in Vancouver now, getting himself interested in timber, and it would be simple enough to bring him round when he returned to Texas to wind up his affairs there. No hurry about tackling him.

And so he talked on, bringing Lynn back to his old sense of ease and good fellowship. He was like that, was Comlough. A man who gave all—his confidence, faith, good-will, friendship along with his money and sympathy—or gave nothing. Not a man of half measures in any particular.

"That's all there is to it then, Evans!" he concluded finally. "Come to the office about eight-thirty to-morrow and I'll straighten out your little mix-up." He went round to Lynn and put his hands on his shoulders. "You'll come out all right, old man. We must get Marcia her money back, and you'll land feet firm, head up, too. There are some other things I'm going to shove your way besides that Texan Improvement business. Of course, I don't have to say that what I told you was confidential—almost not mine to tell. It's a reasonably safe but delicate time for us."

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Lynn put his hands on Comlough's, which still gripped his shoulders.

"Cooper—you can trust me as you do your own soul!" He gulped with an emotion strange to him; a surge of youthful friendship for Comlough commingled with gratitude came over Lynn. "Cooper, old man, you're better and bigger than I am—I realize it now if I never did before; but you will never know all the gratitude that is in me to-night. All I can tell you of it is this—if you're ever in trouble as I guess and hope you never will be—you will find there is nothing of mine in this world which is not yours. Call on me, Cooper, if ever you have to, and there is in God's world nothing I wouldn't do for you."

It was in this manner that Cooper Comlough saved the man, and the man professed gratitude and pledged himself to come to Comlough's aid should he ever need him.

CHAPTER III

HALF-WAY over Williamsburg Bridge Tom slammed the brakes on and turned sharply to avoid a soggy, burlapped bale that fell from a truck directly in front of Comlough's automobile, which was speeding toward Manhattan taking full advantage of the Saturday-afternoon westbound freedom of way. The front right wheel struck the bale a glancing blow which shook the machine and jolted Comlough out of a satisfactory reverie over a golf score, representing his first holiday frolic since his return from Texas. An interchange of sententious personalities between Tom and two truckmen as they flashed past, and the incident was forgotten while he mulled over, as men will, the pleasantries of the green, when the machine stopped short. Tom turned to him.

“Sorry, Mr. Comlough. Something’s gone wrong up there in the hood—maybe that jolt back there did it.”

“Can you fix it?”

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“Sure! Have it in a minute.”

Comlough looked at his watch. It was four o'clock.

“No hurry, Tom. Get me up to the club around six-thirty, that's all.”

He surveyed the neighborhood in which they had stopped. It was the gray, shabby belt of the Bowery a few blocks below Cooper Union; somnolent, unpopulous now in the warm Saturday afternoon. Tom did not have the machine fixed in the promised minute, and as the succeeding minutes multiplied Comlough eyed with increasing thirstiness and decreasing distaste a saloon whose decay seemed to be timed for completion on the arrival of the drouth era, still two months away. With no particular sense of condescension, however—he had freshly come from a region where men took saloons as they took other men: as they were, not as they ought to be—he walked round to the side door and entered a dark, ill-smelling rear room. It took a minute before his eyes became accustomed to the rancid dusk after the white spring glare which had brightened the Bowery.

He sat down at a table beside the narrow sheet of thick window-pane, painted a dirty, opaque

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yellow. He was shielded from the door by a partition. At a corner table on the opposite side of the room sat another man. Comlough was attracted to him by the single shot-like glance leveled at him from eyes as dark and unchanging as the holes of rifle barrels. Even in the dusk of the room his eyes had a depth of darkness all their own. He was dressed in oily overalls which for some reason contrasted incongruously with his lean-jawed, hard face, that had something untamed and untamable in it, and with his air of poised litheness—a certain sense of caged springiness, as he sipped a glass of beer. With his far-flung acquaintanceship and instinct for people, Comlough was struck by something unusual in this solitary drinker met in the drab rear room of a Bowery saloon.

He pressed a bell-button and ordered his drink from a glassy-eyed barkeep with a case-hardened leer. The man across the room drew out the last sip in his glass as Comlough drained his, and was about to rise when his dark eyes shot one of their direct glances at the door and he sank abruptly back into his chair again.

Without noticing Comlough, two men came into the room. They had the scowling, predatory vis-

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ages of the more primitive types either of criminals or the hunters of criminals, blinking there for a moment against the darkness, until they spied the man across the room. They approached him, their hands significantly forethrust in their coat pockets. The man, with a certain expectant tensity, opened his hands and extended them over the table.

They advanced like a pair of cheetas stalking a tiger, the other watching them steadily, his eyes alive with a kind of black flame, while a knot rose on the side of his jaw. The stouter of the two men rapped on the table with his knuckles.

“We got you now, McDevitt, you——!”

The unprintable word ripped through the gloomy room like a forked flash of heat lightning. The man seemed to settle into greater compactness, and then relaxed. His hands only, rigidly thrust out before him, shut and opened again.

“Where’d you learn this act, Donovan? I’m clean o’ your crowd—I done my turn.”

“Get up, you crook!”

The other hesitated a second. He was already rising, however, as the fist of the second man drove at his jaw. With perfect alertness he moved

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his head to one side—almost slowly, so exactly did he time the blow—and kicked the chair away from behind him. He stood quietly confronting them. The other struck at him again. His right arm flashed up and struck the blow off.

“Go slow there, Kenna—” he began, and closed his lips tightly, avoiding a third blow. The stouter man had drawn a revolver.

“Stick ‘em on him, Bill!”

“Hold out your hands there, Mystic Fingers, you g—— d—— murderer!”

The man drew back, his hand gripping the chair behind him and he swung it in front of him.

“You’ll finish me here, if that’s your game,” he said deliberately; “but you’ll never frame me for another dose of the pen.”

They laughed—much as cheetas must laugh when they come upon a trapped tiger. The stouter man called him that in his next words.

“Oh, you’ll get yours this trip awright, Tiger! You finished Condon, didn’t you?”

“That’s it, is it?” His hand still evaded the steel rims constantly being pushed with menacing insistence nearer to his wrists. He was slowly backing toward the wall, keeping the chair off the

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ground between him and the others. "That's a helluvalie, an' you know it, Donovan!"

"Who did, then?"

"I don't know. *I* didn't!"

Warily they closed in on him.

"Who did, then?"

"*I* didn't!"

"Who did, then—" They were almost on him.

"*I* didn't—! Stop!" He lifted the chair. "I did seven years, and you'll let me alone now or I'll do murder right here. Condon got his graft and wanted to hog the world—you got yours, didn't you—ugh!"

The big man's foot landed against his leg with a sickening thud.

"Shut up on that! Ferget it! I didn't get nothin'—see!"

The man in the corner swayed from the kick, but the chair still did not come down.

"You didn't get a thing—I get you," he said quietly, almost purringly; with ominous self-control. "All right! You're on the level now—fair enough. That's what I am now—on the level—see? I paid for the right to be, didn't I? That's why you're gone t'leave me alone. I know

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what you want. Either you'll make me pull a framed job or you'll frame me down the line. Stay right where you are! It's nix on that, though—see! I've done all the mystic finger work I'm gone t' do—get that solid! So leave me alone, or you're organizin' a murder right here, Donovan!"

For all the threatening control of his voice it had in it the pathos of an infinite hopelessness. The little man made a feint at his arms. The chair wavered for an instant aloft. The big man raised his revolver. . . .

"Let that man alone!"

Three men looked toward the table at the window. Comlough advanced toward them. He had lived with frontier crowds and floating riffraffs of laborers, and he had ripe experience, political and otherwise, of New York criminology.

"What are you riding that man for?" he demanded. "Take your hands off him!"

There is nothing comparable in confusing the tyranny of minor authority to the assumption of greater. The big man faced Comlough, his fat jowl jutted out; but a wavering of his bully's brutality manifested itself in his thick voice as he growled:

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“Who’n hell are *you*!”

“Cooper Comlough, that’s who!” answered Comlough, as though the name contained ultimate power. “A personal friend of Commissioner Endicott and Deputy Commissioner O’Hara, that’s who! An intimate friend of Deems Stover, that’s who—and now you know! Here’s my card. My machine and chauffeur are right outside here—get that!” A slight wagging of the revolver in the officer’s hand prompted this reference to reinforcements. “But I know you, Donovan! I’ve seen you around Headquarters and there’s more than one weird spot in your record!” He shot this at the fat man with pure inspiration, for he had never seen the man in his life before; but the bluff carried. “I’m going to take charge of this man, and I’m going to get his status straight. Step away there, and let him through!”

It was amazingly easy, after all. Comlough, six feet of mysterious authority; his lean, tapering prelate’s face set in an adamantine mask of determination, intimidated the two officers thoroughly.

“Just a joke,” mumbled Donovan.

“You ought to go on the stage with your sense of humor,” suggested Comlough. He preceded the

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others to the door with the man. "Now beat it!" he said tersely.

The two officers shifted uncertainly for a moment, and as they turned off like a pair of discomfited curs, he led the man to his automobile. The man held out his hand.

"I don't know what you butted in for, but I'll say you got away with it," he said quietly. "I appreciate it, Mister."

Comlough shook hands with him, but made no answer. He noticed that the man had an extraordinary hand: long artist fingers with broad, sensitive artist tips.

"Got her fixed, Tom?"

"No, sir—something wrong still. It's got me guessin', Mr. Comlough; but I'll get it in a minute, though."

"Make it fast." He had no particular desire to linger in the neighborhood.

"Maybe I c'n give you a hand," volunteered the other. "I've stripped and put t'gether enough of 'em in my time, so's their original parts couldn't 've told their orig'nal owners who they were."

He began fumbling among the ignition mysteries as though by divination, and within five minutes

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the engine was running. Chagrined, the chauffeur gathered up waste and tools and got behind the wheel.

“Don’t get sore,” said the man. “Machin’ry’s more’n second nature to me—it’s first.”

“Get in. I want to talk to you,” said Comlough.

The other paused, and stepped into the machine.

“If you have time, Tom, take a turn through Central Park. . . . Now, let’s have some facts. Who are you?”

“Joe Glenn’s the name I’m usin’ now. They used to know me as ‘Mac’ McDevitt and ‘Mystic Fingers’ and ‘The Tiger’ down at Headquarters, where they run to fancy names.”

He gave them, however, as names anyone should remember. But they made no impression on Comlough, who said:

“I noticed your fingers. They’re remarkable. Like an artist’s, I should say.”

“Rec’lect the robbery over at the Coggershall Steel Company, in 1910? I opened their globe safe with just them ten—artist’s—fingers!” he said with a bitter emphasis on the “artist’s.”

Comlough started. He recollected with graphic vividness. Herschel Doliver, president of the

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Coggershall Company, was one of his best friends. The safe, guaranteed unbreakable and built into an impregnable wall, had been opened without violence.

Comlough turned to look at him better.

"This is quite a coincidence. I know Doliver well. He used to wonder that a chap with your talents would want to buck against all the risks we cautious folks put up to keep you out of our private affairs. Sort of funny."

McDevitt, or Glenn, was silent for a moment.

"Funny!" he repeated bitterly. "Funny like hell! Crazy, you mean."

"Well, what really happened that got you into jail?"

"There was four of us on the job. We finished clean. A pal o' mine named Wherry was soft on a girl named Trix Fitch. She was stringin' him along, playin' tag on the q. t. with one of Head-quarter's playmates—an official crook named Condon. The papers was screamin' extra on the Coggershall job, an' the way I dope it out is that Wherry got a swell head and began hintin' round to impress his dame. She passed the word to Condon and he and Donovan plowed into us one

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night. It was soft for them, and they was willin' to be reasonable at about eighty per cent. We got twenty-four hour's breathin' spell to pony up. In that time Condon got shot. I knew who did it. *I* didn't. Wherry didn't, and Donovan knows *I* didn't. He swung the Coggershall job on me without mixin' us up with Condon, because we could've reeled off testimony on our own, and at the same time he knew we couldn't squeal on him for makin' us whack up because that would've brought a pal of ours to the chair. Nine years with two off. I've hit all the thrills and speed I want in this life! I learned my lesson, and the lesson was that you can't get away with it. My ten fingers is as good as they ever was. There's lots waitin' for me to come back to 'em. Lots tryin' to pull me back. But I wouldn't go back into the game again, not if they killed me."

His lean long jaw knotted stubbornly.

"They've only got to get me tied up to one other job—it don't make no difference how little it is—an' *good-night!* I'll go up the line then for good an' all. Say, my life don't mean a damn thing to me. I could risk it—like that!" He snapped his fingers. "But not for prison. Sooner or later I'm

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goin' to come smack up against it though," he went on somberly. "They're out to get me. You can bet this car against a old newspaper they had a lad waitin' for me to-night. Just as they will some other night. Get me down a block from Headquarters an' grow reasonable. Willin' to let me off if I'll do just one small trick on a pipe job. An' then, there's the dope on me all over again, for good an' all."

"They're making New York pleasant for you," Comlough commented. "What are you going to do about it? I understand that the usual procedure is to follow a man trying to be honest and have him kicked out of every job he lands, isn't it?"

"They got a longer arm when a guy's on the level than when he's got reason to be duckin'."

They had turned into the Park. In the May dusk the new foliage took on the violet delicacy of Japanese etching. Comlough stole a side glance at the man next to him who was looking out on the ineffable loveliness of the fulfilled spring evening with an expression of bottomless hunger. Comlough drew out his pocketbook.

"You've been working? Fixed for enough to get over to Jersey?"

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Glenn looked at him wonderingly, the famine not all out of his eyes.

“Sure!”

Comlough filled the back of one of his cards, with writing and passed it to him.

“Go over on Monday; about eleven, I should say, would be a good time to get him. Tell him how I met you. I’ll call him up to-morrow or Monday, too.”

The man read the card:

DEAR HERSCHEL:

This is Joe Glenn, the “McDevitt” who did seven years for making a monkey out of your pet safe in 1910. He’s sort of a mechanical wizard, I imagine, and trying to get a square deal in honesty now, but virtue is beset with difficulties in Manhattan. The old gang is hounding him over here. Give him a berth and I shall guarantee him to the limit.

COOPER COMLOUGH.

“I’m going to see someone close to Headquarters on Monday,” said Comlough; “and I promise you neither Donovan nor anyone like him will bother you again.”

They had swung out of the Park and were approaching Comlough’s club. Glenn looked straight at him with his black eyes.

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“Every once in a while a guy runs into somethin’ white—an’ I guess that’s the only way the world keeps goin’ between gaps,” he said with surprising philosophic accuracy. He looked down again at the card between his fingers. The machine drew up before the broad clubhouse, and he reached for Comlough’s hand. “Mr. Comlough—thanks!” he said simply. “I’ll be there with bells on, Monday. If Mr. Doliver’s willin’, neither you or him’ll regret it, I’m tellin’ you.”

“All right, old man,” said Comlough heartily. “I know men pretty well and I haven’t got a doubt about you.”

They stood facing each other on the pavement for a moment.

“I guess you’ll never have no use for anything a guy like me can do fer you,” said Glenn; “but if you ever do, Mr. Comlough—I’ll do anything to pay you back. You can always reach me through my sister—Sadie Miles—over at forty-two seventy-one Flatbush Avenue.”

He turned and walked rapidly away. Comlough went into the club a little thoughtfully; a little inwardly smiling at Glenn’s offer and unconsciously repeating in his mind:

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“Sadie Miles—42—71 Flatbush Avenue.”

It was in this manner that Cooper Comlough rescued the Tiger; and the Tiger professed gratitude and pledged himself to come to his aid should Comlough ever need him.

CHAPTER IV

FOR many reasons now Comlough would have preferred not to visit the Lynns, but Marcia called him up and made him promise to come for dinner the following night. She was leaving the day after to open their country house, Knolynn. He planned to go directly from their house to the station, as he was leaving for Washington at midnight on certain matters of importance connected with United Americas and the Estacado venture.

He walked to Lynn's residence, and as he approached it his feelings were a mixture of trepidation and embarrassment. He had an unimaginative dread of betraying in some involuntary look, gesture, or lack of old cordiality his knowledge of Lynn's acts, none of which in reality he would—could—have done. Deep within him the tenderness he always had for Marcia was even greater, now that the instinct of helping had come with the opportunity of so doing. But he felt more than

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ever under the necessity of concealing his feelings from her.

As he rang the bell he remembered—or thought he did—that he had never visited Marcia and Lynn since they were married without a certain embarrassment of which the present seemed only an acute variant. One of the things which made it easier for him, however, was his preoccupation with his own affairs. The first slight hitch in his plan to get control of the Estacado had occurred that day. He had received a wire from Texas that Kilcairn could not be found. He had lighted out unexpectedly a few days before, and none knew where he had gone.

Lynn had fully recovered his old self-possession, and Comlough found moments in which to admire what after all must have been an assumed gaiety. When they finished dinner Marcia went with them into the library. Just as they sat down to smoke, Miss Graves, the governess, came in to call her to the nursery to say good-night to the children.

“Come up with me, Cooper,” she said. “They will just love it.”

He went up into the beautiful, airy nursery with its clutters of toys, sunshiny pictures, and gay

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colored loveliness and general sense of immaculate, cosy spaciousness. The tiny pajama'd Marcia insisted on clambering over him, while the more sedate Evans confronted him with a great, grave gaze and the demand for a story. He rumpled little Marcia's intractable gold curls into still greater dishevelment and recited a kind of white house on a green hill against a blue sky account of a wee girl and big tame coyote and a still bigger horse he had seen on a ranch in Texas. Evans heard him solemnly through and courteously said "Thank you." Little Marcia shoved her tousled head under his arm and drew his hand down over hers. Then she swung herself up and whispered, "I wants a big dog and horsey, too, Uncle Cooper —may I?"

He was deeply glad that he had been able to help Lynn; but somehow, the thought of it made him ill at ease. He found himself avoiding Marcia's clear gaze whenever it turned on him. He fancied there was questioning in it. He wondered that Lynn could have risked all this upon anything in the world, no matter how certain it might seem.

In the library Lynn sat back in his chair intently

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puffing a cigarette, his coffee untouched on the tray beside him. A speculative gleam lighted his eyes as he lazily brought them to meet Comlough's when the latter entered.

"Everything all right now, Evans?" asked Comlough.

Lynn nodded. "Quite, old man." He dropped the cigarette on the tray and abruptly got up. "Come into the study." He rang for the butler. "Timmings, tell Mrs. Lynn Mr. Cumlough and I are in the study, and to let us know when she comes down."

Comlough had suspected for some years that this was a method of Lynn's to apprise Marcia that he did not wish to be interrupted; to-night he felt sure of it.

As they entered Lynn's study, a rather severe, workmanlike shop in his otherwise sumptuous home, Comlough's attention was immediately attracted by an object not in the room when he had been there last. It was a polished metal sphere about three feet in diameter, set in a cast-iron base. On one side and toward the bottom a few lever-like projections and a small disk knob broke the shining smoothness of its surface. The steel sphere was

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set between Lynn's dull grey Italian desk and a metal cabinet.

"What's that?" Comlough pointed to the big sphere.

Lynn smiled.

"Take a close look," he said, leading the way to it. "Ever see one like it? Can you see a crack in it anywhere?"

For a moment Comlough saw nothing but the unbroken sheen of the surface. Then he discerned the tiniest imaginable breath of a circle on the side about quarter way round from the disk and levers. He ran his finger over it, but touch was a sense too clumsy to discover it.

"That's the door," said Lynn. "The latest thing in safes. There's not a chisel in the world that can nick it, nor an acid that can rot it. Even if it were drilled here at the knob and blown apart it wouldn't rip, and if it did it wouldn't do a bit of good, because it wouldn't be open then. Even if it were got into by violence, in spite of everything, a current leading from the base would be waiting inside powerful enough to electrocute a man."

"Sounds thrilling!" laughed Comlough. "Where and why did you get it?"

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“The Spheroid Safe and Vault Company had a master mechanician named Brownlow in their shop. He perfected the first Atlas safe, and was—this is strictly between us, Cooper—well, swindled out of a fair share of the proceeds. He spent eight years perfecting this fellow and I induced Munthe to lend him money to incorporate in his own name, holding security on his patent. This is the first finished product he turned out.”

“Looks stunning, must say—not bad in any parlor, eh? Does he make 'em in boudoir styles, too?” asked Comlough solemnly. “Got it for Marcia's jewelry, I suppose?”

“That, and whatever papers and so on I want to stick in. Safer than a bank.”

The same thought about the safety of a bank must have gone through both their minds, because Lynn dropped his eyes and bent over the safe. His body cut Comlough off from a view of his hands. He heard a sort of racket clicking; a whirl forwards and backwards; another triple click and a circle of the surface raised itself about two inches with a winding motion as though unscrewing itself from the rest. Another whirl of the disk and a third racket clicking, and the circle of steel slowly

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turned on an invisible hinge like a door opening. A blank wall of copper stretched across the opening. A series of six curved steel pins, about an inch thick, pierced the copper at one side and held the circular steel door as solidly as though it were nailed to a granite slab.

"That copper sheet is lined with a three-inch thickness of steel. The outside surface of the safe turned in," Lynn explained.

It opened and slid noiselessly apart in response to another manipulation of levers and disk, and something he did to one of the hingeing pins. An array of little doors with individual disk knobs was revealed. In the center a door about eighteen inches square evidently guarded the main box or compartment, which was surrounded by a series of varied sized but much smaller spaces. Lynn opened the large door by its own combination, and all but two or three of the others. There were nine in all. Comlough noticed that once he took his hand from a knob which he was about to turn. The opened compartments contained jewel-boxes, papers, trinkets of sorts.

"Well," said Comlough, as Lynn, taking out several papers first, again closed the safe, "if I ever

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get the Hope diamond or the Kohinoor or the Crown Prince's diary I shall buy myself one of these things."

They settled themselves into chairs and Lynn spread out the papers he had taken from the safe and pushed them toward Comlough.

"Here's the first reaction from the Texan Improvement crowd. Fifty thousand will buy that block."

Comlough had already given out two statements which had killed the market on that stock.

"Good enough for a start," he said. "I'll give you an order for it on Hannemann." He made the order out. "Everything smooth with you now, Evans?"

"Perfectly. Your plans running as you want them?"

"Ye-es—" Comlough hovered over the word. "Kilcairn has momentarily disappeared, that's all."

"Think he might have got wind of anything?"

"No. We'll locate him in a day or so, I guess. But it's queer. Left no word where he sailed to. That's the funny part of it. He's the kind that leaves tracks a county wide behind him."

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Lynn puffed reflectively on a fresh cigarette.

“It would hold you up pretty bad if you didn’t locate him or his stock, wouldn’t it?”

“Throw me against Bonsell and Cann, that’s all. And enough! Kilcairn could stick me pretty hard if he got a stray notion.”

“It would be bad if Bonsell and Cann—or somebody with their block—got hold of Kilcairn’s, and got pig-headed, wouldn’t it?”

Comlough gave a short laugh.

“Damned bad!” he said grimly.

“What’s doing in Washington, Cooper?” asked Lynn, changing the topic.

“An unborn railroad, for one thing. Here—this will give you the lay of the land.” He leaned over the desk and traced a map on a pad. “Here’s the Canassus—Utopian Acres are over there, northwest; here’s Cactus Hollow, a ravine really, coiling round from Utopian and shooting a spike across and touching Canassus about here. Here’s a place called Healy’s Farm, where we connect with the Long Horn and Lone Star’s contemplated spur—this is the line of their franchise. We’re going to pocket that by to-morrow or Thursday. I’m not waiting till Porter gets back, after all.

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There are people in Washington who can induce him to give me his whole road, contingent franchises and all. The entire line I have to establish for my transportation purposes goes about like this. Swinging out from the Canassus and Utopian through Cactus Hollow, winding in here, and out here—Cougar Gorge—into Red Basin, over here to the foot of Table Hill and Erckmann's Creek. It's fairly clear sailing from there to Healy's Farm, and from Healy's Farm to Sheridan, the last station on the Long Horn and Lone Star. All these are spurs we need. I'll probably switch the Long Horn off its own main track here at Moore, the third station beyond Sheridan, and cut across here with a new line to Baird's Ford. From there I can connect up with the principal roads, as well as Houston and the Gulf, with a total of more than a thousand miles of rail saved. The route I've shown you here is a hundred dollars a foot cheaper than any other possible one."

Lynn examined the chart interestedly.

"How's Washington going to settle it?" he asked.

"Morrissey, Lommax, and Krull in the Senate and House. They'll assure me of what state con-

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cessions I need, and put their shoulders to the sale of Porter's property through a chap named Walpole, who was associated with him."

Comlough leaned back, tearing the paper with the drawing on it into small pieces. He leaned over the desk and threw them into the metal waste-basket behind it.

"Good work, Cooper!" said Lynn quietly. "You're winning out in a big way, old man."

It did Comlough good to hear this from his old friend. He glanced at the ship's clock on the mantel, and rose.

"Got to trot now, Evans. Have to drop in on Stover before I leave, to get a note from him to somebody who may be of use to me in Washington. Due to meet him at that Broadway club of his before ten-thirty. By the way, ask Timmins to call up my place and have Ochia bring my bag to the station."

They went into the library and while Lynn instructed Timmins to do as Comlough had requested, the latter took leave of Marcia, who had entered a moment before. Comlough had the impression that she had been waiting for them, but had respected Lynn's desire not to be interrupted.

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He had the half thought—half hope, perhaps—that Lynn would tell her of his work, as he had told it to Lynn. He both wanted and didn't want her to surmise how much of his love for her had been turned into the channels of his work.

“I'll go a ways with you,” said Lynn suddenly, as Comlough turned to shake hands with him.

They walked down Fifth Avenue a few blocks, then stood on a corner chatting, while Comlough kept a lookout for a taxi. Walking alone up Fifth Avenue a stylishly garbed woman passed them. Comlough was glancing down the avenue for a cab, but as the woman passed he happened to turn toward Lynn sufficiently to note his expression. Lynn's face had that predatory impassiveness with which the better bred male appraises a casual woman who might interest him.

In the taxi Comlough found himself meditating over that expression on Lynn's face as the woman passed. The incident—it hardly was one—rather one of those little moments of casual appearance which sometimes let outsiders deeper into men's souls than years of day-to-day companionship—maintained itself insistently in his mind. To save his soul he could not keep from connecting Marcia

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with it either, which irritated him. He had no especial sympathy with anchorite ideals, being neither a hermit nor a monk in a world populated to a charming degree by desirable women; but there were considerations of square play involved in a partnership of faith with a woman like Marcia. It was not a question of decency, perhaps, but certainly one of good breeding for Lynn to give no occasion for speculation to any man. Himself—Lynn—included. Somehow, he seemed to be happening upon Lynn a great deal lately in betrayals of that credo of his—good form.

CHAPTER V

THE entrance to the Broadway political club which Deems Stover visited on necessary occasions was by way of a continuous double flight of stairs. At best, day and night they were dingily lighted; and to-night, as Comlough climbed them, a curious thing happened. He was half way up the second flight when the low candle-power lamps over the landings went out and the stair and hall were blanketed in darkness. At that moment a spread of illumination was emitted for a moment as the club-room door above opened and two men came out. They closed the door and stood for a moment on the landing above Comlough.

“Hell, Pooley, what’s the idear anyways?” said a mean, whining voice. “I been waitin’ since twen’y after nine en’ et’s twen’y o’ ‘leven now. ‘N hour ‘n’ twen’y minits. What ‘n hell kep’ che?”

“Swell time I had diggin’ up Weaver,” grumbled a thick voice in response. “Keep yer shirt on—I

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got the real dope now, an' we'll stick the thing through. Where'll we go?"

"Damn it, it's late's hell f'r me now an' I gotta come 'cross with a couple pulls an' yank someb'dy inna that damn' Night Court t'night or'll be hell t' pay with me. Stagg's give me warnin' jes' t'night."

"Ah, cheese it—that'll be easy 'nuff t'do. It won' take us more'n a half an' hour. Let's go over to Sol's. Kelly'll mebbe be there. Ye'll've loads o' time t' shoot along Broadway yet an' nab off any ol' tart."

"Awright," agreed the other sullenly.

Comlough shuffled purposely against the steps, and the two men above started promptly down. They jostled him slightly in passing. As he fumbled for the doorknob to the club-room the lights went on again. Out of curiosity he bent over the bannister and looked down. The stouter of the two men, who were now just reaching the street level, had on a gray suit and a black derby; the other, somewhat cut off from Comlough's view by his companion, wore a suit of brown stuff and a brown Fedora.

He opened the door and went in. Those who

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know Deems Stover have probably felt the incongruity of him in any such surroundings. At once the antithesis and parallel in political acumen to M. B. Patricks—the famous M. B., political Nestor to the New York *Chronicle* and all of the Walsh papers; a quiet-spoken gentleman who knows by intuition the unexpected dartings of the political goose which may lay golden eggs and never recommends slaughtering it—Stover, too, was quiet-spoken, sagacious, and a gentleman. But in contrast to M. B. he seemed a precocious child; not as old as Tammany itself—slender, boyish, alert, smiling. A thin, long face, with a thinner, longer nose, and thick dark brown hair; steady, lens-like eyes, a slight Yankee nasality of speech. He knew everybody, could use them and everything from the spread-eagle to the walking delegate. He divided life equally between meeting people, the long-distance telephone, and the telegraph office. And always there remained his youth and enthusiasm; especially youth—the more astonishing that since he was out of college this boy had been in the most youth-sapping, illusion-crushing game in the world. Probably he had retained his youth because he had never had any

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illusions to lose. He had been born enthusiastically sophisticated, and sophistication being one of those rare traits of man likely to suffer no diminution in force with the years, he had kept both it, his enthusiasm, and his youth.

Standing behind the rickety railing now, which was supposed to give a conference privacy to one end of the big room, talking to a puffed-out man who dangled a fraternal watch charm that would almost have covered a teacup, nobody would have suspected that Stover was the mental and organizing force behind some of the most astonishing political maneuvering in the State and country. Without interrupting his conversation he waved a boyish greeting through the fog of tobacco smoke at Comlough, as soon as the latter entered. Comlough picked his way between two intensive poker games with an extensive fringe of spectators who seemed to resent his efforts to get through.

"Hello! Waiting for you, Cooper," Stover gripped his hand. "Let it go at that then, Sam, and ring up Smiley to-morrow and tell him how you made out. . . . Come over here, Cooper." He led the way to the farthest corner of the railed-off space. "Sit down, boy."

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"Just left Lynn. Had dinner up there to-night. Wants to be remembered to you."

"How's he, anyway? I saw him about a week—I know exactly—Wednesday afternoon, first of May," Stover had that gift of exact memory for passing trifles. "Over on Thirty-seventh Street just off Sixth Avenue. He was with Marcia—I think. Didn't get a chance to get to him."

Comlough's mind reverted to the incident of the passing woman on Fifth Avenue a half-hour before, and matched it with Stover's words. He happened to know that on Wednesday, May first, Marcia had not been in town. Stover took something from his pocket.

"Here's your letter to DePinna. You know Dick Worthington and Billy McDill pretty well, don't you, Cooper?"

"Of all the august Senate and the honorable House, none better."

"Well, it should be clear sailing, then. Worthington has strings on your man Walpole, and McDill is thick with your Venezuelan party."

They talked a few minutes more and then went

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downstairs together, parting at the curb where Stover entered a gray touring car, to be rushed off to some midnight conference or other.

Comlough walked slowly down Broadway lost in the flux of half thoughts. He was rather grotesquely summoned out of them. A woman jostled against him in the crowd issuing from a theater. Her face came close to his; her eyes, fairly large but like diamonds for hardness and intentness fastened on his; her body grazed his insinuatingly, while a reek of patchouli and violets and odoriferous talcum swirled round him and she and he were separated by the infillading crowd.

He sought to place her. He had seen her somewhere before. Then he recalled, not her, but a woman he did not know either, but of whom she reminded him—the woman who had passed Lynn and himself on Fifth Avenue. Had she not been coming out of the theater—the program still in her hands—he would have believed she was the same one. He crossed Thirty-fourth Street and turned toward the station, when he noticed that it was only a quarter-past eleven, an hour before his train left. He was not sleepy, and the night was lovelier outdoors than in a berth. Hesitating a

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moment on the opposite side of Broadway he faced north again and walked back.

As he approached Forty-second Street, in the still-water blocks between it and the Metropolitan Opera House, a figure detached itself from the straggling file of pedestrians coming toward him, separated from others on the pavements by something familiar. It was the woman who had passed him on the other side of Broadway.

Between her and him a man was sauntering northward. Suddenly he half turned toward a shop-window, bringing himself squarely in front of her. It seemed to Comlough that he said something to the woman, but he noticed that she stepped out of his way—further than this, paying no attention to the man. Yet the man's gaze followed her for an instant, and abruptly he turned and did the same, overtaking her a few feet in front of Comlough. Again she veered a little to one side and at the same moment the man's hand grasped her arm. He wore a suit of brown stuff and a brown Fedora. Comlough heard him say, in a mean, whining voice:

“C'mon!”

“Leave me go!” Her eyes were glittering and

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beady as a snake's. The man turned back his coat and disclosed a metal shield.

“Y'rerun in, see? I been watchin' ye the hull night prowlin' up en' down here, an' y'c'n think up a story t' tell the magistrate down at the Night Court.”

In the instant before Comlough spoke—quicker even than the woman had a chance to reply—he had a flashlight picture of wry humor of himself interfering for the third time in ten days with the process, right or otherwise, of the law. But the power of seeing himself from a spectator's point of view lessened nothing of something akin to fury at the man in front of him, whom he recognized as one of the two who had passed him on the dark stairs leading to the club-room.

“Suppose you take your hands from that woman?” he said levelly.

The man shot at him a leer of indifference. “Say—outside with that stuff, feller! Y'rund long 'r I'll haul y'in, too, see?”

“You heard what I said.”

“Say—” He interrupted himself to give Comlough a second glance, not of indifference this time, but of hate. “Hey, there, Dave!” he called across the street.

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From the other side a patrolman separated himself from the shadows of the shops.

“Where’n hell d’ye git this stuff, heh? Y’ stand there!” spat the plain-clothes man at Comlough, whipping himself into a rage and with each syllable of his rising voice adding another to the gallery.

“What’s up, Gus?” demanded the patrolman.

“This stiff here’s tryin’ t’intafere with me pullin’ this Jane here. I gotta notion t’ run ‘im in, too—wha’ d’ ye say?”

The officer looked Comlough over. He was a shrewder judge of people than the other, but he also knew how the average human loathes being implicated in a “scene.”

“What’s the idee—go ‘head, run ‘long!” he growled, addressing not Comlough particularly but the whole gathering of spectators. He raised his club slightly to one side. “The ‘ole bunch o’ye—break ‘way there—d’ye hear?—whadda ye’s standin’ here fur?” Now he gripped Comlough’s arm and attempted to turn him round.

Comlough wrenched his arm loose with a jerk, anger in him mingled with disgust at having implicated himself in this mess.

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"Where do you imagine you are? If you put your fingers on me I'll have that badge and uniform off you in an hour. That fellow was out to make an arrest without investigating who he took. I saw the whole thing, and he'll let that woman go or I'll know why."

The patrolman was impressed. "Hadda make a pull!—What'n—" spluttered the plain-clothes man; but the other interrupted him. "If ye know so much 'bout it—I guess ye kin go down with her and tell it!" he said to Comlough, weakening a little, however.

"I most certainly will—" began Comlough, and stopped. It was the last thing he wanted to do. A clock diagonally across the street pointed to twenty minutes of twelve. His train left at 12:15. The two officers saw his look of hesitancy and both took it for a backdown.

"Ring fer the wagon!" snapped the plain-clothes man instantly. He walked with the woman in the wake of the patrolman and Comlough through a scattering of onlookers.

"I assure you you shall be sorry for this—both of you!" Comlough protested.

His words pricked the patrolman's pride of office

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or insulted his thick imperviousness to regret. He wheeled menacingly.

“Say—listen here, you! I heard 'bout all out o' you I'm gonna take—get that? A minute more'n I'm gonna run ye in. Now, you beat it!”

All Comlough's thoughts of catching his train vanished in the painful realization of the increasing and idiotic complications of the situation. He stepped to a taxi whose driver had slowed up to watch the excitement.

“Follow the police wagon wherever it takes her,” he said.

As he got in his eyes met the woman's. There was a brazen mixture of camaraderie, self-interest, anger, thanks, and speculation in her face and eyes. Particularly speculation as to the extent and exact character of his interest in her predicament.

CHAPTER VI

JEFFERSON MARKET Night Court is no longer the midnight cabaret of the morbidly curious nor the stamping chamber of the sociological dilettante. There were already stricter rules than formerly regarding admission.

“What’che wanna g’in fer?” the doorkeeper clipped in speech which resembled a contracted hiss.

“Witness,” answered Comlough.

“Where’s ’r loy’r? Y’can’t g’in wit’ou’n aut’r-sayshun.”

“Who is sitting on the bench to-night?”

“J’jjech R’s’ll’sky.”

“What?”

“Jjjj’esh Rr-s’ll’sky!” he repeated angrily.

Comlough regarded him hopelessly. “Roslav-sky—Judge Roslavsky!” a bystander irritatedly assisted Comlough.

Comlough knew many of the city’s judiciary, but not Roslavsky. From what he remembered

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having heard of him he dimly knew him for one of the average men on the bench; an organization judge with eyes cast on the Supreme Justiceship probably, humanly fair and unbrilliant—one of those men whose actual tenure of office causes no admiring commotion in the populace, but whose campaign cards when they trend upward reveal them to have been Nestors in the service of the common weal. He wished Wendleton had been the sitting judge. He had only recently expressed himself in no mincing terms on officers who brought in innocent and semi-innocent girls to swell the list of their arrests or in connivance with shysters who batten on the panic of women. Comlough wrote a sentence on one of his cards; a terse reference to Deems Stover.

“Pass that up to the clerk, please.”

In a few minutes he was inside, and sat in the back of the big dismal room, with its drab gathering of accused and the immediately interested, sentimentally and financially.

Slick-haired, ratty-eyed attorneys scurried up and down the aisle; the strict insistence upon hat-doffing seemed a mockery here in this atmosphere of antique modes of vice, patchouli, and strong

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scent of tobacco, although smoking stopped at the door. A patrolman in clean blue uniform, clasping his hat, standing like a statue on the lower step of the judge's dais, gave the only bit of clean color. A dapper, gray-headed man, with a range of staccato gestures and a voice with shrill gamut runs was baiting the officer on behalf of a corpulent, rouged blonde in black who sat in the prisoner's chair. The lawyer's voice suddenly dropped into a hoarse, enraged mimicry of the patrolman's last words. Roslavsky started a bit; he had been leaning back in his chair, his black cloak floating up in a somber triangle under his hands which supported his chin on the tips of his fingers in a manner which afforded the maximum judicial self-possession with the maximum inattentiveness.

Comlough noticed a man with the face of a savant sliding noiselessly up the aisle, with the effect of covering space without effort. In his dark suit and downcast eyes he was a study in low visibility.

“Barney!” Comlough reached out and touched his arm. Without a sign of surprise crossing his melancholy countenance the other stopped and slipped down beside Comlough. This was the man Stover called “the incarnation of the shadows

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on the backstairs of men's affairs since the first attempt men made to secure power over other men by the ballot."

"Can you work a case up to the top of the docket for me?"

The other nodded.

"It's the arrest just made at Forty-first and Broadway by a plain-clothes man named Gus."

The semi-invisible being beside him raised his expressionless eyes to Comlough's in a strangely regardless glance. It was also Stover who had said that Barney read the secrets of your grandfather in that moth-like look. He got up, and slipped down the aisle.

Five minutes later Comlough saw the matron come out of the door on the left, whisper to the clerk who in turn rose and passed a slip of paper to Roslavsky. The judge nodded. The present case was disposed of a few moments later. Directly afterward the woman on whose behalf Comlough was there was brought in. He saw the plain-clothes man who had arrested her rise from a group of men on the right down in front, with a distinct start of surprise.

"Estelle de Courtney—'rested—F'r'ty-f'st'n-

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Broadw'y—b'Of'ca Merkle—f'r—'costin'—m'n—non—streets!" The clerk half rose and hiccupped the tidings of Estelle de Courtney's presence forth to the court, then passed the paper from which he read to Roslavsky, who made a note on his tablet.

As she sat down in the prisoner's chair Comlough for the first time gained a completed impression of her. There was a sinuosity to her movements which did not depart from her even when she sat down, but continued to manifest itself in the advance and recession of her silk-sheathed ankle which, as she crossed her knees, moved to and fro with a snaky swiftness at a discreet distance from the floor. That silken three or four inches of quickly swinging ankle characterized her. Even her features, alive and intent for all the admirably held pose of indifference, had it—that air of uncoiling sleaziness; that flexibility of flimsily clad motion which was almost reptilian, and just as fascinating.

"Have you a lawyer?" Roslavsky asked her.

"If you please, your honor!" Comlough had come forward to the end of the aisle, holding a little white rectangle in his hand. He spoke as quietly as possible to be heard by Roslavsky, but

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every eye in the room was drawn to him. "Your honor—" he stood before the judge's bench now and extended his card—"I am Cooper Comlough. I was passing by when the arrest of the prisoner took place, and although I have never spoken a word to her nor she to me, I should like to appear for her, merely as a citizen who witnessed an outrage and is anxious to do his duty by simple justice."

Roslavsky looked at the card which had been passed to him, and nodded with awakened interest. Comlough leaned toward the clerk. Officer Merkle was requested to testify.

"Your honor, that man attempted to interfere with—" began Merkle, actual fear on his face. Roslavsky cut him short with a sharp rap of his gavel.

"Officer Merkle!" he said with ominous severity. Better than anyone in the courtroom Roslavsky recognized the power of influential opinion with which Comlough, whom he knew by sight, might at some critical time be able to reward him. "You are called upon to testify, and you will please state the facts upon which you arrested the prisoner."

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Merkle twiddled his Fedora. "I was 'signed to duty 'n Broadway f'om Thirty-fort' to Forty-sec'n Street. I got t' Forty-sec'n' at nine-fifteen en' 'bout a half-hour later I seen the pris'ner foist, walkin' by the Heral' Buildin'. She stopped 'side a man that wus readin' the bull'tins en' she turned t' 'im en' said somethin'. He turned away en' walked off. I foller'd her, en' I seen her walkin' close ta three other men, but I don' know ef she spoke t' 'em—" He was getting hold of himself in his impudently meek and stupid recital of what he purported to be facts, and now adopted a pose of exactness. "No—" he meditated slightly over the word—"no, I don' think she spoke t' any of 'em. Et Forty-sec'n' she crossed over en' I los' track of 'er in Times Square. 'Boutta hour later I seen 'er agen, en' this time I seen 'er talkin' ta a man et Thirty-eight' Street. They walked down a block en' he left her, en' she walked on slow agen. I foller'd 'er on two trips she made 'tween the McAlpin en' Times Square, en' then I passed 'er 'tween Forty en' Forty-foist. When I passed 'er she a'costed me. When I went by she sed: 'Good-evenin'!' I sed, 'Good-evenin',' back, en' turned en' walked b'side 'er en' she came close t' me en'

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sed, 'Where're ye goin'?' en' I sed, 'Where're *ye* goin'?' en' she sed back, 'Where d'ye wanna go?' en' I sed back then, 'Downna the Night Court wit' me.' She started to shy off me then en' I got holt of 'er arm, en' the foist thing I know that—gentamin—comes up en'——"

"Officer Merkle—that is sufficient!" broke in Roslavsky. "Your great trouble, as I have told you again and again in this courtroom, has always been your extreme haziness in regard to what it is the court's purpose to learn at any specific time, and your ineradicable tendency to launch out on some issue in which the court at the moment is not interested, and in which, in its stupidity, perhaps, it is reluctant to be charmed to a departure from its customary procedure, with all due respect to the harmonies of your discourse. Officer Merkle, just at *this* particular moment *you* are not on trial, neither is the gentleman who has come forward in this case as witness. What we are solely interested in for the moment is the *reason* the prisoner who is —*is*. Let this sink into your intelligence, if I am not flattering you. If once again I have to interrupt the business of this court to instruct you in the elements of procedure, a reprimand which shall

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carry with it a salutary, tangible reproof will be meted out to you, sir."

He finished on a note of triumphant bitterness, and looked at Comlough. He was too clever a man to seem to be seeking approbation; but Comlough felt that the Judge had been playing, as the phrase carries, to him exclusively.

"Your honor," Comlough addressed him with a slight bow, "the statements of this officer, besides being ridiculous and condemnatory of himself to start with, are not statements at all, but misstatements. Your honor, this man has said that he was detailed for duty on Broadway and that from shortly after nine o'clock until the time of the arrest of the prisoner was fulfilling his duty. Your honor, I do not know where the officer was at nine-fifteen. I do not know whether he saw the prisoner in Herald Square then, but I do know, if his own words to an acquaintance of his can be believed, that he was not following his duties; that he was not on Broadway for one hour and twenty minutes; namely, not from nine-twenty until twenty minutes of eleven; but that he was in the rooms of the Longacre Political Association waiting for a

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friend—a man he called Pooley—during that hour and twenty minutes.

“Your honor, I was going up the stairs of the club at twenty minutes to eleven when the hall lights went out, and this officer and the man he called Pooley came out of the club-room. It was then I overheard him say that he had been waiting for one hour and twenty minutes. His words, your honor, as I remember them, were these: ‘What’s the idea, Pooley, of keeping me waiting since nine-twenty? It’s twenty of eleven now—one hour and twenty minutes.’ The man addressed as Pooley answered: ‘I had a hard time getting Weaver, but we have everything settled now and we’ll put the deal through. Where shall we go to talk it over?’

“Now, your honor, the next words spoken by Officer Merkle indicate the reason why I am here. It is not to obstruct justice, your honor, but to see it carried out—and that properly. The next words of Officer Merkle also explain the presence of the prisoner, I believe, better than any possible infraction of municipal ordinances of which she could have been capable. These were Officer Merkle’s next words: ‘Damn it, Pooley, it’s late for me now,

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and I have just got to make some arrests to-night and bring somebody into the Night Court or there will be hell to pay. I have to do it because Stagg gave me warning just to-night.'

"Your honor, to offer the last bit of evidence that in the pursuance of his sworn duty this man had neither the time this evening, nor the conscience, nor even the inclination to make just and only just arrests—the conversation which I overheard between him and his companion concluded in this fashion: Pooley: 'Come on, it will be easy enough for you to make an arrest. We shall not be longer than a half hour. Let us go over to—' Your honor, I have forgotten the name of the place where he suggested going, but I remember that they were to meet another man by the name of Kelly there—'you will have plenty of time,' Pooley said to Officer Merkle, 'to go along Broadway and arrest any woman.' Officer Merkle's response to this, your honor, was: 'All right!'"

The plain-clothes man was white; a dastardly, sickly white. His eyes had a shifting terror in them now. It was only incidental—this affair of the woman he had arrested now. The other thing Comlough had hit upon, which involved Weaver

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and Pooley and Kelly, was the basis of the panic that sucked the color out of his cheeks. That side of Merkle is another story. In course of time it put him where he still is, and put him there as a direct result of Comlough's testimony. However, requoting Kipling, that is another story.

The big room was tensely still. The spectacle of one member of the notoriously indolent human race voluntarily exerting himself on behalf of another presented a simple form of drama which is always appealing, from its unusualness if from nothing else. From Roslavsky to the sinuous figure in the prisoner's chair, every eye fastened on Comlough. His voice took on a quietly flaying bitterness.

“Your honor, I am here on behalf of no prisoner or victim of injustice. I am here, at a serious inconvenience to myself, on behalf of the citizens of this commonwealth. I know nothing about the prisoner. I know nothing nor claim to know anything of her life or modes of it—but I do know that arrested in the spirit in which she was arrested she suffered an indignity in which she is not alone, but which strikes at every citizen of this community; that she is as innocent of this particular charge bringing her here as our own sisters and wives

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might be, and that the kind of thing which threatened and overwhelmed her to-night, if not checked, will overwhelm sometime or other, likely enough, our own sisters and wives and daughters. Your honor, I appreciate the privilege I received with your permission to testify in this court."

On the Sixth Avenue sidewalk a few minutes later Comlough called a taxi for the woman. She was subdued to the extent that the provocative sinuousness of her did not flaunt itself, and the reptilian glitter of her eyes was quite replaced by a momentary softening. It was obvious, however, that no pronounced revolution of character had taken place in her through what must certainly have been one of the most unexpected episodes of her life. In the glance which she threw sideways at Comlough as the cab drew up, there was the natural curiosity of a woman wondering how far it was the positive pull of herself, *woman*, attractive, alluring, insinuating in her serpentine smoothness of garb and form, which had drawn him to her defense, as against the abstract injustice of her position. As she got into her cab she stopped and seized his hand in both of hers.

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“Mr. Comlough—!” A saving sense of humor bashed what was evidently an inborn instinct for the theatrical. She gave him the exceeding reward instead, of being natural, and honored him with recognition of the quixotism of his act by thanking him undramatically. “You and I are a long way apart, although you were game enough to talk about me and your wife and sisters in the same sentence. Fair enough. It’s good to hear once in a while from the upper classes.” At that moment he liked her immensely for the self-reliant sarcasm in her voice. “But you are real. Certainly there’s no way I could ever pay you back. If ever there could be, I’d do about anything to prove to you what a real sport you were, and you’d learn by just calling up Audubon 41476 where they always know in a general way where Ethel Pearson, which is my real name, is. Lord knows, I’d like to pay you back, but I guess I couldn’t do it any better than hoping you’ll never need anybody’s help. So long! . . . Driver, take me to West End and 109th Street.”

As the cab drove off and he turned to call another, the name Ethel Pearson—Audubon 41476—41476—Ethel Pearson—repeated itself in his mind

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even as he confronted the inconvenient truth that by now he should have been near Philadelphia en route to Washington. "Audubon—41476—"

It was in this way that Cooper Comlough extricated the snake—as he recalled her, the insinuating serpentine smoothness of her, the ready dart of her satiric fang in that hit about the "upper classes," the beryl-green glitter of her eyes. He actually thought of her as something humanly reptilian; and strangely, it was not uncomplimentary. Yes, he extricated the snake from momentary grief.

And the snake in gratitude wished him continuous good fortune, but assured him that should he ever be in trouble she would do what she could to help him out of it.

CHAPTER VII

“LIFE runs in three!”

From somewhere the phrase came to Comlough as in review he recollected the remotely parallel situations of Lynn, Glenn, and the Pearson woman. Curious concentration of opportunity to indulge in Samaritanism three times over in less than two weeks. A man might go on living an additional allotment of life and never be confronted with such a succession of demands upon his simple brotherliness.

Ochia having undoubtedly returned home from the station by now, he was on the way back there, too. He would telephone some telegrams to Washington announcing his later arrival in the Capital—and that was all for that.

The downstairs lights were burning brilliantly when he drew up to his house. It struck him as peculiar. It was after two o'clock. He paid the taxi-driver and hurried up the steps. Before he got his keys out the door opened and Ralston, his

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butler, stood there, his usually marmoreal countenance a conflicting canvas of excitement, bewilderment and relief at sight of Comlough.

“Oh, sir—I—I am so glad you are still—that you came, sir! I didn’t know but—understand but what you were hurt, sir—I should have called for the police, sir, in another ten minutes—and you have not the *bag*, sir—I——”

“Man alive! what *is* the matter?” demanded Comlough. In the hall a cluster of servants were surrounding a scared-looking Jap boy who was gazing full of fear at him.

“Why, sir—!” exclaimed Ralston, “I—we thought something had happened to you, too, sir—because—sir—the bag—it was stolen from Ochia, sir!”

“What!”

“Ye-es, sir—quite so, sir!”

Comlough stood dumfounded, staring from the butler to the Japanese.

“Sir—Mist’ Comlough—I remain in station in waiting and long waiting—when you come not bime-by I go to the telephone and to speak to Mist’ Ralston. For one second only I leave the bag out of the hand to give to the ticket man the quar-

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ter for change and I look down—and the bag is away!"

There was no doubting Ochia's story, nor his sincere panic, nor his bottomless remorse. In five years he had never failed Comlough in the slightest particular. Comlough looked at him intently for a moment, probing him with a gaze which the Japanese met with a beseeching mortification—an infinite abasement that hurt Comlough.

"That's all right, Ochia," he said quietly. "Ralston, put out some of these lights, send the others to bed, and then come to the study. Ochia, come with me."

He led the way to his study, followed by the heavy-hearted Japanese.

A deep foreboding of disaster filled Comlough. The bag! It contained confidential correspondence with Hargreave, Clewes, Hamilton, Prime, and others of the Atlantic Distribution Company, Shipping Board, and Fuel Administration; with Colonel Maurice and with Sidonio Godoz, Marso Molina, Emilio del Corral, and other influential South Americans, in regard to the Maracaibo operations, concessions, etc. Dozens of phases of United Americas Petroleum operations were repre-

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sented by confidential data in that bag. The addenda on the Mexican situation alone—against the proposed nationalization of the big wells from Tehuantepec all the way up, by Carranza. Specifications of a new type of tanker and tank cars; notes on a secret system almost perfected, which he believed to be superior to the Rossard, for extracting gasoline from low grade oils; a report upon the Morton Process, a combination of tubes and stills to make whatever gravity and endpoint of gasoline might be required and at the same time produce kerosene distillate, gas oil and heavy fuel oil, obtaining ten per cent. more gasoline and naphtha than by any other process. But principally, the bag contained the outline of all his struggle to gain absolute control of the Llano Estacado—in that bag was the stark, undisguised reasons for all his attacks on Utopian Oil and Texan Improvement—the very gist of all his planning, all his labors, all his hopes and his future and even his honor—his obligations to his associations.

The bag was lost—stolen!

CHAPTER VIII

WITH iron self-collection Comlough quietly directed Ochia to sit opposite him and questioned him.

The facts were disastrously simple. Timmins, Lynn's butler, had telephoned Comlough's message to Ralston, who had told the Japanese to carry the bag to the station. Ochia was at the gate of track eleven, the Washington 12:15 express, at a quarter of eleven. People were already going in to the train. Eleven o'clock came; eleven-thirty; twelve o'clock; twelve-fifteen. He did not know what to do. The train went off; still no Mr. Comlough. He waited until twelve-thirty; then he went to the telephone booths. His smallest coin was a quarter and he crossed to one of the ticket cages to get it changed. For that moment he had set the bag down at his feet.

As far as he remembered in his present confusion, no one else came to the wicket; no one was near him. He received his change; put two dimes back

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in his pocket, holding the nickel out, and bent down to pick up the bag—and it wasn't there!

Comlough took a memorandum out of his desk, listing the papers which had been in the bag. He did not need the list. He remembered each separate lost paper vividly enough. But the list gave him something to look out on, and steady his mind by getting it off the results of the loss. He looked up from the paper finally, forcing all his faculties into a cool attentiveness on means of finding the bag, or, failing that, of counteracting the effective use of its contents by others.

There were two possible explanations of its theft. First, a common sneak-thief, noting the unassuming but undeniable richness of it would have been led to believe that its contents were at least in accordance with its exterior, and, watching his opportunity, had "lifted" it. Somewhat daring—but the proof of the possibility was that the bag had been stolen right from the feet of Ochia.

The other possibility was the graver one that persons who had something to gain by getting possession of United Americas Petroleum plans, or who were interested in the direction of Comlough's future public reports, learning of his in-

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tended Washington trip, had taken a desperate chance that the bag might contain valuable information, and stolen it. Desperate, indeed—but again, the proof of the possibility was the fact that the bag had been stolen literally from under Ochia's feet. As to who would know of the bag's contents, he was the cynosure of all oilmen and oil speculators' eyes, and there being other companies who could expect an attack from him in the press, as he had attacked Utopian Oil and Texan Improvement, there would be men who, fearing him, would have reached the stage in their nervous precautionary scheming of being able to identify Ochia and the bag with the "C. C." monogram. Or men hating him—Aleck Bonsell? Mangin?

But who would have expected him to miss the train, and that Ochia would set the bag down in order to get a quarter changed? Certainly not a common sneak-thief. But would not anyone going after, or sent after it, planning perhaps to steal it on the train, stick near it until positive that it was going on the train, and seeing that it wasn't, accept the first, if flimsiest, opportunity of pilfering it? And be prepared instantly to take advantage of that opportunity, full of risk as it was?

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At best—or worst—even the garden variety of sneak-thief would see that the papers were valuable and understand that particular persons might be eager to pay heavily for them.

The more he considered the importance of the papers—and their importance lost nothing in his continued examination of it—the more he realized what it would mean for anyone—say, for Bonsell or Mangin—in the oil-stock game to get hold of that confidential information. What it would mean in dollars and cents! His hold on the Estacado was dependent upon keeping the bag from men who could block his plans if they got possession of it. More important at present to him than the granite financial stability of United Americas Petroleum in its old state, was his dream of extending it and organizing the output of the largest oil resources in the world. That dream would be a bubble with that iridescent trifle's duration if the contents of the bag were passed round before he got Kilcairn's block of Utopian or bought in the majority holding of Texan Improvement. At best it meant, if ever anything was to be done in the Estacado, that his method of going about it had failed in the first and simplest stage; that he would

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step down from the driver's seat; that someone else—Colonel Maurice or someone Maurice selected—would step up to it. He saw with painful clarity that what the bag contained was not papers of value but the invaluable confidence of a group of powerful men who would be affected as much by his loss as he himself.

Back and forth his thoughts sawed themselves into a controlled groove. He wasted time and energy neither in mourning, hopeful illusions nor in reproaching himself for having packed the papers in the bag in the first instance, and in entrusting it to Ochia in the second. He had done the same thing hundreds of times before; told himself savagely that he would again. He spurred his mental shoulders to the problem. There tightened in him that tenacious, fanatical will to fight on for his plans; the theological stubbornness to hold dogmatically to the course he had determined upon, which was characteristic of him.

First, whatever assistance the police could give him must be enlisted, without scattering news of his loss broadcast. Ochia, of course, had already notified the station officials. He had no qualm of uneasiness in turning to the police for help as the

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aftermath to the thoroughgoing manner in which he had exposed the venality of one member of the force in the Night Court. Comlough knew that, sanely and soberly regarded, the rank and file of the police force were hard-working, often keen-thinking, courageous, earnest men—men kindly in the main, who had chosen the work because something husky in their nature was appealed to by the hardiness of the duties. The police honor-medal men—the Graces and McGovern and Fitzgeralds—represented the force more fairly than the types he had been thrown into dramatic conflict with in the Bowery saloon and along Broadway.

He got Inspector Snell of the Center Street bureau on the telephone, and a few minutes later sent Ralston and Ochia to the Twenty-third Precinct to meet a Central office man. When they left he sat for fifteen minutes thinking deeply.

Hargreave and Colonel Maurice—should he inform them at once? He picked up the telephone again to call the former from his bed; but the number he called was not Hargreave's. He could not leave New York until the bag was found. But if the papers were being conned over in inimical quarters he had to get in touch with Washington

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more promptly than ever. It was a case of reconciling opposites; eliminating the paradox of distance. Krull, Lommax, Morrissey, Worthington, McDill—these he felt reasonably certain he could call from Washington himself; they would bring Walpole, too. But DePinna was a ticklish Venezuelan, and Godoz, Molina, and del Corral were super-erratic Colombians. The number he called was Stover's. He had him roused out of bed.

“Deems—come down to my place at once. I need you—bad! Will you come?”

“Coming!” The click of the receiver sharply hung up put an exclamation point on Stover's response. He decided to wait before calling Hargrave and Maurice, calling Updike and Aiken instead.

A famous publicist recently writing in a well-known liberal-radical periodical, termed the Llano Estacado development of the United Americas Petroleum Consolidated, “our first bulwark against Bolshevism.” Few know the story of the days when the fate of the great organization hung upon the theft of a little black bag. Least of all is known the part which Deems Stover has had in the unwritten history of the oil company. He

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appeared shortly before four o'clock, fresh and alert as though it were midday. He wore his customary enthusiastic demeanor of being old friends with each of the twenty-four hours of the so-called day, which neither the unexpected woes nor vagaries of mankind had power to dispel. While Comlough told him what had happened, he toyed with a ball of crumpled paper—he never smoked.

“Whom did Snell send up to the Twenty-third?” was all he said when Comlough finished.

“Couldn’t tell you.”

In a few minutes he had Snell on the wire. “Chief, this is Stover speaking. Send Kirkman up on the Comlough case, will you?—Yes.—Right away.—How? Get him out then—right away! And, please—this is air-tight, you understand. All right. Thanks a lot!”

He hung the receiver up and turned to Comlough.

“If it’s kicking anywhere within kicking distance of the station, or just some ordinary crook’s taken it, Kirkman will get it back. Now, let’s go on.—What is the particular thing you got me down here for?”

“To bring Washington to New York.”

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“At current freight rates?”

“Airplane rates, if necessary.” Comlough threw the letter Stover had given him to DePinna on the table. “I want the addressee of that to collect it in person.” He leaned across the table, speaking rapidly, with a tenseness seldom in his speech. “Deems, I want you to get DePinna, Molina, and if at all possible, Emilio del Corral and Sidonio Godoz up here—to-day—this afternoon. You know how to get at Morrissey, Krull, Lommax, Worthington, McDill, and Walpole better than I do, probably, on a quick call. Get them up here for me. In ninety-nine years out of a hundred anything that has big money in it can be swung from New York better than from any other place in the world. This was the hundredth year for me, and Washington has the call. I can’t go there. Still less can I let whoever has my papers get to work in Washington with them while I’m here. You’ve got to bring Washington to New York for me.”

For several minutes Stover kept his gaze on the crumpled paper, slowly revolving it in his fingers.

“Cooper,” he said at last; “you’re one of the people I believe in. I’m called a good judge of

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people, too. I want to ask you only one thing.” He looked steadily at Comlough. “This oil project of yours, is it a square proposition—in every way? Don’t be irritated at the question. Is it—in every way?”

Comlough regarded him wonderingly. “It is. As square a dream as a man ever dreamed, Deems.”

“It’s communistic, you said. Now, I know you’re not a red shirt. What you mean by communistic is that it’s elastic—can stretch with the times, and will not be a peg to tack down what our left-wing friends call the capitalistic privileges?”

“It hasn’t been endorsed by Lenin and Trotsky, but despite that it has taken the man in the streets into consideration—and into partnership to an extent that’s fairer than anything which has been tried. So fair, that if he goes on a sabotage rampage he will cut off his own head.”

Stover hesitated a moment, and gestured toward Comlough with a short laugh. “You know, politics is a curious game. According to mythology it’s always crooked. Well, according to my particular lights, I’ve beaten that legend. I’ve never let myself in for a shady deal. I’ve never been the callboy for special occasions, special circumstances,

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special parties, or special interests in anything off color. My record has a number of people puzzled because it is open, and people that want to get something on you have the devil's own time believing anything that isn't damning." He broke off with a shrug, and smiled whimsically at Comlough. "Just as you look ahead and realize that old business ways are hitting the toboggan, I see as much in politics. It isn't merely a question of not letting anybody get anything on me—there's some of that in it, to be sure; my usefulness depends on avoiding that—it's because—at least, I hope so—I have some sort of principle about what influence I can swing in the political affairs of lots of Americans. I have to use a number of things which have come to my hand and in which I do not particularly believe; but which I cannot do without altogether, either. Things like that Longacre Political Association, for example, and the crowd in it. Certain types of ward heelers and district bosses and county and local chairmen of peculiar complexion—and odor. I don't use them in the spirit of compromise with my own ideas; I use them because there's work I've got to do and hysterics."

He drew the telephone to him.

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"This puzzles you a bit as to how it fits in with your immediate needs. It does. You see, I can give a man any number of letters to any number of individuals occupying ringside seats in Congress and legations. I'm always shooting letters round. Not letters just like those I gave you, of course—but even that left me free from responsibility in whatever project you're pushing. On the other hand, when I ring up Washington, as I'm going to do now, and ask several gentlemen from Texas and Latin America and elsewhere to come to New York to talk over matters pertaining to the glory and industrial advancement of their several communities, incidentally, and to the glory and industrial advancement of Cooper Comlough and United Americas Petroleum—and mankind, as you tell me—mainly, I want to be sure of the mankind, Cooper, because I am in reality endorsing your schemes. I want to make sure that I'm safe in doing so. Anyhow,"—he laughed, as he lifted the receiver,—“Tillinghast told me just day before yesterday, that the slipperiest stuff in the world wasn't mercury or banana peels or ice on the front doorsteps, but petroleum, and that a man hadn't ought to trust his mother on anything connected

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with an oil gusher, either in the well form or the human form. However, I'm discarding his excellent advice and taking a chance on you, old man! Here goes!"

It was half-past five before he got his Washington connection. He gave instructions to someone named Teath to deliver a message to Will Boies, whom Comlough knew slightly. The purport of it was that Senators Morrissey and Worthington, and Representatives Krull, Lommax, and McDill were to be impressed with the urgency of taking the eight o'clock express out of Washington for a conference in New York on a matter of vital importance.

McDill was to bring Rafael DePinna of the Venezuelan Legation, and Worthington, Major Josiah L. Walpole, who was at the Willard. Boies was instantly to get in touch with Arthur Godfrey of the Pan-American Union, and with D. H. Angus, chairman of the board of directors of the North and South American International Export Alliance, who was also at the Willard.

In brief, the reorganization of United Americas Petroleum in a manner closely affecting the Republic of Colombia made imperative an im-

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mediate interview with Marso Molina and Emilio del Corral, of the Colombian Legation, and their friend, the great landowner, Sidonio Godoz. A day late would be too late. Godfrey and Angus could persuade the South Americans to come to New York, if anybody could. Boies was to call Stover at Bryant 48,000 as soon as they departed. He gave the hours he could be reached there during the day. When the parties arrived in New York they were to repair at once to the offices of United Americas Petroleum, where the president of the company, Mr. Cooper Comlough, would be awaiting them.

Stover rose. "Boies can drum them together, if it's possible; but you will grant, man, to rouse the District of Columbia at six in the morning with instructions to make an eight o'clock train is allowing no elbow room for contingencies."

"I've made trains with far less leeway."

"But you are not a congressman, Cooper; nor a South American. I'm going to stop in at the Twenty-third Precinct on my way back now to see what has developed. I want to keep in touch with you. You'll go down to your office about when?"

"Be there at ten. Updike and Aiken will be

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there at eight. I'll have my secretary, Wallace, on the wire every half hour. You can relay any news to me through him."

As they parted in the hall Stover turned to Comlough as though he had suddenly recollected something.

"By the way, Cooper—you came to the club directly from Lynn's, didn't you? About what time did you leave him?"

"Ten-fifteen. He walked down Fifth Avenue with me about six blocks. There's a clock there at Sixtieth—just above the Netherland. It said ten-fifteen as I got my taxi."

"Lynn's not associated with anybody in the speculating game—somebody he might have run into after you left him—all things are possible, you know—liable to meet anybody any time in this town—someone he might have given an inadvertent tip, just in the course of conversation about you—he having just left you—you know how talk centers round the immediately departed, and all that sort of thing—just somebody, you know——?"

Comlough had given an involuntary start at Stover's mention of Lynn in connection with

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speculation, unobserved by the other, who was busy at opening the door himself. Not even to Stover would he have dreamed of speaking of Lynn's peculations—besides, they had nothing to do with the matter in hand.

"N-o," he replied; something in Stover's tone puzzling him. "Nobody at all."

Stover stood silent for a moment in the open doorway, and seemed to ponder over something.

"Well—so long, then—see you later!" he said abruptly, gripped Comlough's hand and hurried away.

CHAPTER IX

COMLOUGH bathed and changed, with the grim satisfaction of feeling that, bad mess though things were in, he was at least trending to a reorganization of ways and means. He had still no inkling of what was in store for him. At seven o'clock two telegrams were delivered at opposite sides of North America. One was addressed to Richard Porter in Vancouver. It read:

Your sale of Long Horn and Lone Star to Texcol Corporation premature. Could have got better price. Will dispose of your other holdings Texan Central as requested.

WALPOLE.

The other telegram was delivered in Washington, D. C., and offered Sidonio Godoz four hundred thousand dollars for an option on a certain Magdalena River property, provided certain concessions regarding other oil lands in Colombia could be effected. The telegram was signed "Texcol Oil and Asphalt Corporation, W. R. R. Yerger, presi-

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dent." It brought Señor Godoz who, despite his extensive clutch on a vast section of his native land was in need of a prompt sum of cash, more quickly than quick into the presence of Señors Molino and del Corral to effect the specified concessions for Texcol Oil and Asphalt.

At eight-thirty o'clock a small, cool man, with a habitually governed gaze, closed with Rafael De Pinna a satisfactory arrangement concerning the Maracaibo Lake Basin concessions which Comlough had been after.

Before Comlough left his house he called Lynn's home. Things would have to move fast that morning. He wanted both enough additional Utopian to give him control, and control of Texan Improvement—at any price.

Marcia answered the telephone without even the intercession of Timmins.

"Why, Cooper, where are you calling from?"

"My home."

"I thought you were in Washington!"

"I missed the train."

"That explains why you kept Evans out so late. I thought you had taken him with you."

"Why, Ev——"

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"Now, no excuses!" Marcia interrupted. "Evans left for the bank more than an hour ago," she said in answer to his next words, a request to speak to Lynn. "You know," she went on, "I am taking the children out to Hempstead to-day, so I don't suppose I shall see you for a while. But you will come out, won't you, Cooper? Please promise!"

It was exactly a quarter to nine by his watch when he hung up the receiver. Why Lynn should have gone to the bank at a quarter to eight irrationally bothered him for a moment; then the thought passed. It was replaced by a peculiar uneasiness, not connected with the bag or his own affairs, aroused solely by something like a hint of hurt in Marcia's voice. Why should that be there? He hardly knew what gave him the impression that it was there. She sounded cheerful enough. But his impression continued.

As he was leaving the house, Ralston returned. The detective Kirkman, and the man Snell had originally dispatched to the Twenty-third Precinct, were now making a canvas of hotels in the vicinity of the station in company with Ochia, to discover whether anyone bearing a bag similar to Comlough's had come in during the night.

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He hurried to his office. The immediate matter to be attended to after terse consultations with Updike and Aiken, and instructions to his secretary, was to get that grip on Utopian and Texan Improvement. Kilcairn and his block of Utopian must be located without a moment's loss. He sent off four telegrams to Texas on Kilcairn. Lynn had already been in his office and cashed the order he had given him on Hannemann the night before for fifty thousand dollars for Texan Improvement stock. He called up the Clinton Loan and Trust, but Lynn was not in the bank. His first actual shock came when he called up Medill and Spear, the brokers who were acting for him through Lynn.

"Why, hello, Mr. Comlough, I thought you were in Washington!" Medill greeted him over the wire. "Mr. Lynn was just here and said you left last night. We've struck a jam on that Prairie Extension, Mr. Comlough!" Prairie Extension was the telephone code phrase for Texan Improvement. Comlough's blood grew cold at Medill's words. The broker talked on. "Mr. Lynn came here with the draft to buy the Extension we were offered yesterday. This morning not a particle of

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it is for sale. Do you know what happened? It's amazing! Our stock-breeding interests—you know—materialized! Actually! They have sold out the Prairie Extension to large cattle interests at nine o'clock this morning! Mr. Lynn nearly collapsed when we discovered it."

Comlough felt like a man chained to a stake, looking up at the overhanging lip of an avalanche held back for a second before it uproots the last obstacle. Deliberately forcing himself into a calm which was stark grimness, he took out a box of cigars, painstakingly selected a beautifully made cigar, clipped its point neatly, and slowly puffed it aglow. He rang for Wallace.

"Get me a report on the cattle-breeding people who have just bought up the Canassus," he directed quietly.

By eleven o'clock he had the report. Cattle-breeding interests had bought in Texan Improvement—cattle-breeding interests!—blue deep-sea eagles! The Texan Improvement and Petroleum Corporation had been bought up by one Texcol Oil and Asphalt Corporation! An obscure concern about a year old. By all that was fantastic what had this diminutive organization, whose

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capitalization was less than half a million dollars, wanted with the Estacado?

"Get me a complete report on Texcol Oil and Asphalt," he ordered.

He called up Lynn at the bank. His line was busy. He hurried over to Hargreave's office. Wallace had already informed him, as well as Colonel Maurice, of the loss of the bag, and Comlough found them closeted together. He thought he perceived coolness in their manner toward him; but he had no patience for sensitiveness in himself now, nor was he in any mood for explanations of his failure to make his train, his reasons for putting the papers in the bag or entrusting bag and papers to Ochia. Maurice, cold always, despite his conversational expansiveness; cynical often, an instinct for intrigue in him, despite his vociferous advocacy of direct action, eyed Comlough scrutinizingly. He laid a telegram from Washington before him:

Long Horn and Lone Star railroad sold Texcol Corporation by Porter on twelfth. WALPOLE.

And another.

Impossible to come New York to-day. Texcol Corporation taken over Magdalena lease.

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And a third:

Will be in New York on sixteenth. Maracaibo Lake Basin property disposed of to Texcol Oil and Asphalt Corporation.

RAFAEL DEPINNA.

He had no chance to comment on this wicked, triple bludgeoning of his plans. He was wanted on the telephone. Wallace was calling.

“Mr. Comlough—the bag has been found!”

After what he had just read his elation was formal—and momentary. The bag had been found—emptied of the papers. Shortly after midnight a man had registered at the Fesole Hotel, in West Forty-seventh Street. The night-clerk was still on duty when the detectives and Ochia arrived. He vaguely recalled someone registering —having the kind of bag they described. The name was—there it was, written—Carlos Cardoza. Man spoke with soft foreign accent. Tall—dark, as he remembered. Didn’t take particular notice of him. Yes—wore a light suit. Light brown, with darker brown striping. Room 435. They went up. The man was gone; the bag, with Comlough’s “C. C.” monogram on it, there in his room. Contents gone over, but nothing except the papers taken.

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“Anything else?”

“Yes. Mr. Stover telephoned in that the gentlemen from South America could not be here to-day.”

“Anything else?”

“No, sir.”

He turned to Hargreave and Colonel Maurice.

“The *bag* has at least been located,” he said, and repeated what Wallace had told him.

“I will buy out Texcol as soon as I locate this Yerger,” was Colonel Maurice’s sole comment, assuming command.

Comlough hurried to the Clinton Loan and Trust Company. The attendant took his card in to Lynn, and returned to inform him that the vice-president in charge of the loan department was at the moment in conversation with another gentleman, but would be ready for him in a very few minutes. He was led to Lynn’s office. Almost on the threshold of it he passed a little stout man, with bulgy eyeballs and ruddy complexion. There was a sort of roly-poly air about him. In passing he shot Comlough a humorous shrewd look.

“Cooper, what shall we do about Texan Improvement?” exclaimed Lynn the moment he

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entered. "I just heard you hadn't gone. What's happened, anyhow?"

Comlough told him of the bag. Lynn, exquisitely dressed as always, from his dull black shoes to the white bud in the lapel of his fine dark serge suit, leaned toward him, closely following each word.

"Man, that's hell! You got the bag, and there wasn't a paper left? That sounds ominous. What sort of description have they got of the thief?"

Comlough told him the extent of that description.

"Pretty slim to go on—but there's just a chance of landing him on it."

Comlough shook his head questioningly.

"But man alive—what to do? Can't I help you some way? I haven't forgot what you did for me, Cooper. Say anything."

Comlough had something for him to do immediately. "Get in touch with Spear or Medill, Evans, and tackle Bonsell. I can't wait to locate Kilcairn now. In some way get at least six thousand shares from Bonsell or Cann—pay up to twenty-five for them. But get them. Get them!"

He questioned Lynn briefly along lines suggested by Stover. Had Lynn met anyone who was in-

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terested in oil, after he had left him last night? Anyone at all? Had he mentioned Comlough's plans to a living soul—to anyone? Comlough hated this type of querying, but Lynn was not offended. No—not to a soul—not even to Marcia. When Comlough left he gripped his hand.

"No matter what it is, Cooper, that I can do for you," said Lynn earnestly, "give me the word, and I'll do it. Man—only call on me!"

In his office again Comlough got into communication in turn with Stover, Ralston, Ochia, Kirkman, Inspector Snell, and DePinna and del Corral in Washington. Something like chaos seemed to have touched the clean sharp outlines of his affairs. Then, right after lunch, came the most unexpected blow of all.

"Cooper!" It was Lynn's voice which came through the receiver, as he accepted it from Wallace. Comlough read disaster in the mere intonation of his own name coming with a premonitory quaver over the wire.

"Yes!"

"Hell's broke loose!"

Comlough's pulse was like the grinding of ice—so cold.

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“Yes!” he said, coldly, mechanically.

“Gulf Lubricant”—code phrase for Utopian Oil—“sold out to what they thought were stock-raising interests at nine-thirty this morning. Texcol bought them up, too. What’s more—in some way they’ve got hold of Kilcairn and his block!” There was a pause. “Old man, I feel as bad as you do,” Lynn’s voice came over the wire almost brokenly.

Comlough hung up the receiver and went to the window. He gripped his hands behind him and just looked out—looked out. From the pride and eminence of his nineteen stories he saw nothing of the caterpillar fuss of the lower East River and the smudge of Brooklyn. For a long time he saw nothing. Then, instead of the bay and the city across the river, he saw again his illimitable tract out there in the southwest, traversed in two strategic places by holdings he had almost secured—and lost. Saw it, too, as it would not be—as he had dreamed his dream of it; bringing order, purpose, vision into that desolate range plain—something different from the hodge-podge of mud and greed, flash promotion, misdirected zeal, thieving and muddling, weak and avaricious and neurotic hopes

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of wealth which had characterized the other great oil strikes. His dream of great industrial organization to carry the authentic rightness of his purposes from Pago-Pago to Reykjavik! A face formed itself slowly into vividness between him and the scene. Marcia!—The next moment everything was swept out of his mind by the heaviest shock the inherent sardonicism of things and men's natures could have meted out to him.

"Mr. Stover is here," Wallace said from the doorway.

"Send him in." He crossed to meet him. Something in Stover's face stopped him in the center of the big room. "What—is it, Deems?" he asked.

Stover looked at the floor, slowly walked past Comlough, and, tossing his hat on the big table half sat on the edge, his foot slowly swinging, watching it swing for probably a half minute before he raised his eyes to Comlough's. Then he spoke.

"I know who took your bag," he said, slowly, quietly.

Comlough started—more at his tones than at their import.

"Who?"

"Evans Lynn," said Stover.

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Comlough stood graven. Stover thought for an instant that he had not heard. Then he looked down at the oil man's hands. They were interlocked with a visible tension that seemed as though it might snap off his fingers.

"Who—?" he asked, with a kind of dead calm, glaring, glaring beyond Stover.

The latter reached over and gently put one hand on the other's locked hands. The touch broke the strain in Comlough. Something savage flared in his deep eyes, hidden further than ever, it seemed, behind his sharp-shelving brows. In the soaring red hell of that moment he thought of a woman first. He grasped Stover's arms with a grip which entered into the slighter man like a burn.

"Who else knows it?" he snapped hoarsely at him.

"Only Kirkman. He——"

"Won't tell! Understand, Stover—he won't tell! Seal him! Seal your own soul on this! Promise me—man—damn it, promise me!" He shook Stover as though he were weightless, and suddenly dropped his hands from his arms. "Now, Deems—go," he said in a whisper. "Go—I want to think."

CHAPTER X

FOR a long time he sat motionless; not thinking—his thoughts were too volatile—but trying to order his mind sufficiently to be able to think. Gradually, with that curious detachment from his own bruised affairs which he had experienced a short time before, Marcia's face again formed itself with extraordinary distinctness in the distracted spaces of his mind, and he seemed to detect again that slight innuendo of hurt in her voice as she inquired half-jestingly why he had kept Lynn out so late—Lynn! Like motes streaming into a light beam, stray points of thoughts and recollections drifted into consciousness, odds and ends of acts and suggestions of acts on Lynn's part which had been tucked away unheeded in his subconsciousness; to corroborate Stover. Strange he had not insisted on proof; and not strange. The proof was already within himself; it was seeping forth now. The look Lynn had cast on the woman who had passed them; his exaggerated reticence

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concerning his business affairs to Marcia; Stover's remark about seeing him on Thirty-seventh Street with a woman he supposed was Marcia—when Marcia was out of town; the queer inflection of Stover's voice when he had spoken of Lynn in the hallway early that morning; the light brown suit Lynn had worn the night before—the dinner that evening being informal because Comlough was to leave their house to go to his train; Lynn's adeptness at Spanish—having lived in Buenos Aires he could manage the accent which went with that grandee roller of vowels, Carlos Cardoza; Lynn's knowledge of his plans in detail—it was through him, indeed, that the instructions had gone to Ochia to bring the bag to the station. Lynn might possibly have gone to the station at first to ask him about something, and seen Ochia—got the idea of stealing the bag—suddenly. He could do it better than anyone. If Ochia caught him at it, he could laugh it away—would not even have to do that—the Japanese knew him so well. It was Lynn then, who was behind—who *was* the Texcol Oil and Asphalt Corporation.

Almost gently it all arranged itself in his mind; but when his consciousness fully grasped the

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significance and connection of all these trifles and inevitable conclusions, they seemed more authentic than Stover's statement itself; they rained conviction anew in on him with horrible, freshly revealing light.

Like a world of skyscrapers tumbling on him, the revelation of the perfidy of his oldest friend—the man whom he had saved from jail—came crashing about his head—came, too, amidst all the throbbing racket of his horror at it, with as indisputable claim to actuality as the daylight. It is one thing, however, to have a thing revealed to one; another thing entirely to comprehend it. For a long time he sat trying to comprehend it. There were minutes when he repeated over and over, "My friend—and he did this to me! My friend! My friend!"

He buried his face in his hands, and his shoulders shook convulsively, despite his iron self-control, before he completely got himself in hand again, and he muttered:

"Marcia—oh, God—Marcia! Marcia!"

Now, it so happened that need befell the hunter in the old Laos fable, and remembering the man

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whom he had befriended and who had promised aid should he, the hunter, ever be in difficulty, he went.

But you know already how the man repaid his benefactor.

CHAPTER XI

“GENTLEMEN, we are willing to do anything in our power to help you further the industrial position of Texas, and the country at large—of that you must be assured—but the fact remains that you have not that necessary beginning you require to start operations. We are willing to see to it that you get the requisite franchises for your railroad; the concessions for your dams and other developments—but obviously we cannot grant you rights for putting down something on something you do not possess!”

Senator Morrissey expressed the minds of his fellows to Comlough, Colonel Maurice, and Hargrave at the end of the two-hour conference in Comlough’s office.

“That’s all right—we will possess them!” said Maurice bluntly. “I am buying this Texcol association out!” he added grimly.

In Comlough’s ears it sounded the death knell of his hopes. In that original plan of his it was

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he who was to organize the development of the great Texas holdings on a basis which was to have been a point of industrial departure and social forward-looking. "Buy 'em out!" The brutal grip of old-time moneyed power and methods exemplified in Maurice was at the helm again.

The meeting broke up, and shortly after five o'clock he was left alone in his office. Irresistibly his thoughts began circling about Lynn. After all, Lynn was the key to the situation. Putting the mere sentimental hurt and personal consideration entirely away from him for the time being, he began to analyze Lynn's position.

He rang for Wallace and ordered the report on Texcol Oil and Asphalt brought to him. The company, he learned now, had been incorporated not one but two years. The president and chairman of the board of directors were one—W. R. R. Yerger. Comlough had heard of him. Never remembered having seen him; remembered no one he knew who knew him. Vice-president and treasurer were unknown to him; the secretary was Timothy Kilcairn! He began dimly to understand in what way Lynn had tied up with this organization. Finding Kilcairn he had found a whole

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miniature corporation ready to be used—on the market probably for a song.

Gradually as he pushed on his study of Lynn's connection with Texcol—seeing him now hiding behind one of the unknown names as vice-president or treasurer; sensing him as the power behind the whole organization, which he had so conveniently come on, just as Comlough's confidences made the use of such machinery opportune—one recurrent question protruded itself more and more insistently. Where had the seemingly inexhaustible fund of money with which the Texcol had bought in the Long Horn and Lone Star R. R., Maracaibo concessions, the Colombian holdings, Utopian and Texan Improvement, come from? And gradually cold suspicion grew in Comlough to the hardness of fact. It had come from where that other sum had come—the coffers or the time envelopes in the vaults of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company. Vice-president, head of the loan department, Lynn could in his discretion issue loans upon preposterous security, if he were so minded—lend a million dollars in a few instalments on a deed of Brooklyn Bridge!

He had been silent after that night when he

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first learned of Lynn's manipulation of bank funds. Lynn must have been shrewd enough to have covered *that* transaction completely by now, and how could he prove it? Furthermore, he was implicated himself there, if anything—vicariously as accessory. Moreover, digging it up would not aid him to get back the options and stocks and railroad he wanted. And then the effect on Maurice and Hargreave and others that he had so debonairly chatted away his plans and the secrets of United Americas Petroleum to a man who had come to him, his hands still full of the muck of his slimy handling of a position of wealth and trust. He must get Lynn some other way. It must be done delicately. At the first hint of trouble Lynn would probably effect the sale of everything he had feloniously acquired—to Maurice, say, at a colossal profit—without connecting himself in the slightest way with it. But there must be a way to get at him, before any such sale was consummated.

There crystallized in him now the implacable purpose to crush Lynn; to strip him and crush him until it hurt unmercifully. His fists closed, and suddenly, as he concentrated on this determination to smash Lynn, he saw before him again—

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Marcia! Again, under the weight of all that was torturing him, he thought of her. Yet for once she seemed unconnected with Lynn, although in thinking of breaking him he had thought of her. Aloof she seemed, remote from the man who had been his friend, and the picture of her now in no way weakened the vow he made to strip and crush, smash and break her husband even if that necessitated the revelation to her of that husband just as he was.

But the rottenness of it! Evening came on. He got up and looked out of his window. Sunset on the greatest harbor in the world. Nile green, purple, orange, carmine, prismatic the water shone. The width, the significance of it; the deep throbbing peace and serenity of it. The rottenness of men! Men's words—promises! They were like a bad taste in the mouth. Lynn—that night he had waited for him to come out of Hargreave's house, and gone with him to his home. How he had pulled him out of disgrace, dishonor, dismay, distress, ruin, prison, damnation!

"Cooper—you can trust me as you do your own soul!—You will never know all the gratitude that is in me to-night!"—Syllable by syllable he re-

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called Lynn's words, mentally repeating them in Lynn's very intonation. "All I can tell you of it is this—if you're ever in trouble—you will find there is nothing of mine in this world which is not yours!—Call on me, Cooper, if ever you have to!—And there is in God's world nothing I wouldn't do for you!"

He cried the last words aloud in the silence of his office, and then leaned back in his chair and laughed. Laughed, laughed! The grating guffaw of disillusionment. Maudlin, treacherous drivel! And he laughed and laughed, that genial fund of human kindness in him shrinking with each mirthless note of that laughter. And then, by a mental cross current, a kind of crossed wiring of thought suggestion, he remembered two other protestations of gratitude made by a man and a woman—a tiger and a snake—to him, and he suddenly fell into deep, brooding silence.

After a while he drew a piece of paper to him and began to make brief notes, pausing frequently and straining his memory for something of frailest substance. He made many corrections. Eventually he had a short table of jottings set down.

"I. Clicking—like a ratchet—three or four.

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- “2. Knob whirled forward then backward—no more than three-quarters revol. each way.
- “3. Triple click—like 1. This brings up outer door.
- “4. Knob whirled again. This turns outer door.
- “5. Works levers.
- “6. Whirls disk.
- “7. Twists hinging pin. This opens copper door.”

He had seen the night before what pride and confidence Lynn had in that safe of his. Lynn's safe! That was the key to the situation! It was a mania with Lynn. Like a child with a toy. Then, of course, in that study of his he had unmolested freedom to contemplate and work over his schemes, spread out what plans he was sketching, examine, unbothered, what papers he needed to examine. Lynn had a whole bank to keep papers and stocks in, but Comlough had the feeling—as certain as any he had ever had—that Lynn had tucked his most secret and valuable materials into his own safe. For corroboration he now remembered the way Lynn's hands had involuntarily gone to the door of one of the locked compartments, only to be quickly withdrawn.

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It was about a quarter of nine when he got up from his chair with a start, stiff with the immobility of the last hours. But he had found something. He went out to the deserted telephone board, and plugged a connection himself.

“Audubon 4-1-4-7-6!” he called.

He asked for Ethel Pearson. Not there, a thin sharp voice informed him. Could they tell him where he might get in touch with her? Yes, at once. No—but she was going to call up around ten-thirty. She was expecting another call to come in at that time. Any message for her then? He wasn’t by chance Mr. Slater? No—he wasn’t Mr. Slater. He was Cooper Comlough. He had a message for Miss Pearson. He repeated his name—spelled it out while the sharp voice repeated the letters with practiced facility and wrote them down. “Please ask Miss Pearson to meet me at the,”—he hesitated,—“in the lobby of the Bristol Hotel at eleven o’clock this evening. Tell her this is urgent. See that she gets my name exactly. Just tell her—‘last night!’ That’s all. Thank you.”

It was nine o’clock. He wrote two notes: turned out the lights and hurried to the elevator. His

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automobile was waiting. He sent Tom with the notes to Updike and Hargreave, and getting behind the wheel himself, drove to Brooklyn Bridge, over it and out Flatbush Avenue. At exactly nine-thirty he reached number 4271, the address of Sadie Miles, the sister of Joe Glenn, alias "Mc-Devitt," alias "The Tiger," and alias "Mystic Fingers."

Comlough had met Herschel Doliver a few days before. "That fellow Glenn's o. k.!" Doliver said.

Glenn was in. He shot a look of astonishment out of his black eyes at Comlough. He was neatly dressed; contented looking.

"I want to talk to you a minute, Glenn. Will you come outside? Take your hat."

Outside on the pavement he regarded Glenn closely. He had lost the lean, feline look of a big cat at bay. His liteness of poise as if about to spring was tempered down to a quiet, less challenging self-assurance. He was like a man newly arrived at safety, and finding it sweet—would never tamper with insecurity again. He met Comlough's gaze with surprise, but also with self-reliance.

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"Jump in. I've got to be in town by eleven. Ride in with me."

He got in without a word; wonderingly.

"Like your job?" They were speeding toward Manhattan.

"Yes." Still wonderingly. He was trying to grasp what it was all about—Comlough's sudden reappearance; the request to ride into town with him; the other's air of a plan up his sleeve.

"Feels good to be straight—with nobody watching you—nobody in the world waiting to put something on you?"

Glenn took a deep breath. "I'll say so! Good—yeh, yeh!"

"You'd never crack another safe, eh?"

"Never again—hell, no!"

"Straight for life!"

"Straighter'n that track ahead of us."

"Nothing will make you, eh?"

"Hell itself couldn't."

Comlough drove on: one block, two blocks, three blocks in silence. "Before I say anything more," he said at last, "in order to maintain your belief that now and then a fellow does lend a lift to another expecting nothing in return for it—I'm

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going to apologize for doing something I never believed I would do. I'm going to remind you how we met."

"You don't have to," said Glenn. "I got a good memory."

"And how we parted."

"I remember it."

"You remember just how it was then?"

"Why—sure—up there at your club," mystification filled Glenn's speech.

"Right. You remember we shook hands—and you said something."

"I can say it now," said Glenn quickly.

"That if I ever needed help—anything you could do for me—you would do it."

"I meant it."

"Anything you could do—you meant it, eh?"

"Yes."

Two more blocks in silence. "Anything you could do!—Well, there is something! Something only you can do for me, Mystic Fingers!"

Glenn started at Comlough's use of that name. "What is it?" he said slowly.

Comlough kept his eyes on the road ahead. "To crack a safe!" he said quietly.

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He felt the man beside him grow rigid.

"To—to crack a safe!" Glenn repeated in a whisper, incomprehensibly, after a time. "Crack a safe!" he repeated again. "To crack a safe!"

"You said to me that night," said Comlough, disregarding the rigidity of the man beside him, "that if I should ever need anything a man like you could do, you would do it to pay me back. Those were your words."

"Yes," whispered Glenn.

"And now I must look at the inside of a certain safe."

The man beside him moved uneasily once with a start, then sat immobile and silent while the automobile cut through an empty block. They passed a trolley midway in the next block. As they flashed through the yellow broadside of light it shed, Comlough turned. Glenn was looking straight in front of him, his face white, drawn; with a knob of muscle protruding from his tensed jaw-line, set with the tightness of a hatchet head driven into a hickory block.

"Ain't there any other way?" he asked softly.

"No other way," said Comlough.

"Is it dangerous?"

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“Yes.”

“What kind of a safe?”

“The best safe in the world, according to its owner. I’ve seen it. It’s a steel ball about three feet in diameter. Made by the man who made the Glober—Brownlow. Double doors, electrically charged base, alarm—everything.”

“Where is it?”

“In a residence.”

The man whistled—rather, shrilled faintly through his teeth. He was still gazing straight ahead.

“In a residence!” he repeated. “I’m out o’ training—I’m out o’ heart with this sort of stuff, Mr. Comlough,” he said wearily. “If I’m caught—it’s life for me, Mr. Comlough,” he said grimly. “Life!”

“I understand that.”

Neither looked at the other. Both stared ahead fixedly. They had swung from Flatbush Avenue long ago and now turned to Manhattan Bridge. Lights pin-pricked numerously the granite mass across the bridge; pricked at intervals and with softer and varied colored disks the smooth gleam of the river. A haze of faint illumination hung

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over the nebulae of the lamps of the city ahead like smoke or—well, like the breath or perfume of freedom, Comlough thought. Life seemed especially big, spacious, precious from that road above the river between the immense halves of the wide world's metropolis. Half-way across the great span Glenn spoke again. His voice had a faint shiver through its whispered syllables; a grate of hoarseness.

“It means life in jail for me,” he muttered, as though to himself, ruminatingly—

“You promised,” put in Comlough softly. He felt the other shift in his seat, and heard him gulp.

“—and you say there ain’t no other way,” Glenn went on, ruminatingly.

“No other way,” put in Comlough; and again he felt Glenn shift, and heard him gulp. They swung into the merging of Canal Street and the Bowery with a swish.

“God—a’right! I’ll do it!” said Glenn quietly.

Through Lafayette Street they raced. At Astor Place Comlough stopped the automobile. He gave Glenn the slip of paper with the jottings of the various manipulations Lynn had given to his safe to open it, as he remembered them. Nothing

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accurate, he explained to Glenn; but still a general chart to work by, perhaps. He told him further what he knew of Brownlow, who had made the safe. He could arrange to have Glenn visit Brownlow's shop to examine the type of safe which Lynn owned, presumably it might be to purchase one. Glenn was to call Comlough's house each evening at eight to learn when they were to meet, and to receive instructions. Either Comlough himself or Ralston would speak to him. The event would take place within the next two or three weeks.

"Understand this one thing clearly, Glenn," he said. "You are under no actual obligation to me. When they jumped you that day my particular sense of justice was tormented, and I satisfied myself when I interfered. Then," said Comlough, his voice pounding along on an even, cold key, "don't make the mistake of seeing me repeat on you what Donovan tried in his way. You never were freer in your life to say if you wanted to do a thing, or didn't want to do a thing, than you are at this minute about this thing. You have a good job. You have made good already. You will keep on in your job; keep on making good, if you come in with me now or not—unless we're caught. If

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you say no to this thing I'm putting up to you, which may mean your liberty, or even your life, there is time right now to get out. I shall probably never see you again; never mention you again; never interfere in any way in your life. Get all this straight, Glenn," said Comlough.

Glenn looked past Comlough for a moment, then put out his hand. They shook hands without a word. Comlough looked hard at Glenn; Glenn looked hard at Comlough.

As Comlough drove through Eighth Street to Fifth Avenue, Glenn stood rigid a minute looking across at the blocked bulkiness of Cooper Union. Then, just as Comlough was swerving round the Brevoort, the Tiger, his face pale, his jaw clamped in that hard-knobbed line, his eyes moving with unusual alertness beneath narrowed and half-concealing lids, a heavy weight on his chest and his consciousness, stepped lithely and swiftly into the subway entrance.

CHAPTER XII

COMLOUGH was in the lobby of the Bristol punctually at eleven o'clock. He had waited ten minutes when a bellboy came through crying his name.

"Mr. Comlough—? Wanted at the telephone, sir!"

It was the Courtney woman—or Ethel Pearson. She talked quickly, as though in a hurry.

"I couldn't come down, Mr. Comlough. Sorry—but just couldn't make it. What's up, anyhow?"

"I need your help," he said bluntly.

"My—help?" she repeated.

"I am presuming on whatever service I may have rendered you last night, Miss Pearson—I need your help!"

"Sure—glad to do anything I can," she said in a skeptical voice, a little as though she had expected the mere male in him to call her soon.

"Come down here right away."

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There was a pause. "That—is impossible," she said hurriedly. "Can't! I tell you, Mr. Comlough—I'm up here at Maxim's, on Thirty-eighth. I'm with a party, and for certain reasons I can't break away."

"I must see you."

There was another pause. "I tell you"—she spoke more hurriedly and lower,—"can you come up here? I don't mean just here. I tell you what: go to Marquette's—across the way—the upstairs dining-room, in back. I'll make some sort of spiel and run across for a minute."

"I'll be there in five minutes!"

He sat down in the rear parlor-floor section of Marquette's table d'hôte. She came in through the double side door and crossed rapidly over to him and sat down.

"Well, what is it?" she asked, a little knowing smile on her lips as though she guessed his errand.

She was still better dressed than the night before, but there was the same twisting sinuosity about her—a sleaziness of raiment and carriage. There was a little too much rouge on her face; her lips were too red; her eyebrows too well traced, and it was too powerful, that swim of perfume emanating

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from her. Yet there was no doubt about it, she was stunning, in the strict Manhattan sense of the word. And she would do wonderfully well for what he needed. She looked at him from under veiling, willing eyelashes, like a woman who has come upon just another verification of her theory of life and men.

“Well—what is it?” she repeated, as though she already knew.

“You said last night I did you a service,” he said, almost brusquely.

She nodded without enthusiasm, as though she had known then that sooner or later he meant to cash in on it—they all do—but she had thought that he would let a few days pass.

“It is not my habit to put people under obligation to me,” he said. “I hope you will understand that.”

“Go on.”

“You said if you could ever help me in any way you would do so. Well—I need your help now, Miss Pearson.”

She was a little puzzled by his detachment: his refraining from playing up to the woman in her. He could see that.

“I know I said I’d like to pay you back. I

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wouldn't forget in twenty-four hours," she said pointedly, without committing herself over again.

He saw that it was necessary to establish his disinterestedness in *her*.

"If you remember, I said last night that I came to the court at great inconvenience to myself," with brutal emphasis. "I missed a train it was important for me to have taken. Later I missed something else, too."

"Yes," she nodded. "What was it?"

"A bag. It was stolen from my man. It contained valuable papers."

She moved uneasily; her raised silken ankle beneath her crossed knees swinging to and fro out of the fringe of her clinging skirt.

"I—am sorry; but what can I do?" she asked, studying him closely. She gave a quick glance at the clock above the china-piled sideboard and again moved nervously. It was obvious that someone important in her scheme of things was waiting for her; obvious, too, that just now she meant that to be obvious.

"This. I want you to go to a man I know—to go to him as though on business—and find out for me how much of a rotter he is."

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She looked at him in amazement.

“He has a wife and two children,” said Comlough, meeting her hard, brilliant eyes; “but I think he would follow you out of the city for several days. He must do that.”

“You want me to go to a man who has a wife and two children and show him up for a rotter by getting him to go away with me?” she asked, incredulous, her eyes narrowing.

“He’ll come after you. I want you to make him come after you.”

“I don’t get you,” she said with deep mistrust. She looked at the clock again. “Besides, I’m going away myself to-morrow—so you’ll have to rule me out.”

She put both feet down and smoothed her skirt at the knees. He leaned toward her.

“Miss Pearson—you *don’t* get me! What I am asking you to do is one of the justest things you could be asked to do. It’s unusual, but it’s just. Whether you believe me or not, when I left you last night I never expected to see or hear of you again. I had passed by—had been able to give you a lift—that was all. I all but forgot you the moment we parted. I had no intention of carry-

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ing the memory of my bit of help to you round with me like a personal note on you to pay up on another day. But now you can lay me under infinite obligation to yourself. For a certain length of time I've got to get a man out of town, who has betrayed every trust men and women put in him; a man who has struck me pretty hard and all but knocked me under. And, in a sense, I can't move against him because a woman ties me—and I want to prove that aside from his relations to men, his relations to women are such that I don't have to feel tied by her, because she should be under no delusions either. You see what I mean?"

She looked steadily at him.

"You mean you're in love with her?" she said.

He lowered his head for a moment. He raised his eyes to her again.

"That—Miss Pearson, I am not at liberty to discuss," he said quietly.

She leaned over to him and touched his sleeve.

"Mr. Comlough, I'll admit this sounded weird to me at the beginning, but now I'm sorry I can't help you."

"Exactly why not?"

"I'll tell you why," she said. "I'm going away

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with another man to-morrow. It's the kind of berth I've been looking for for a long time. He's well-fixed and in the theatrical game. I'll have all I can ask for—and all sorts of chances on the stage. Second-rate vaudeville, maybe; but that's a big time better than the kind of stuff I used to do, which was anything from rough-house dancing to snake charming. Pearls round my neck now instead of snakes. He's across the street now—swearing blue murder and wondering what became of me—but that don't matter. When it comes to minutes I can stall him off. But days—that's out of the ring. I've kept him hopping three days overtime already. I was walking time away last night before meeting him, when I ran into that mess, and believe me, there was some blow-up when I did get him. He's leaving for the Coast to-morrow on movie stuff, and I have to go with him. If I don't—well, frankly, Mr. Comlough—the chance won't come hunting up little Ethel again."

She rose, and he rose, too. There seemed nothing more to say. Only in his mind some words kept ringing.

"Certainly there's no way I could ever pay you

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back"—it was Ethel Pearson's voice speaking in his memory—"If ever there could be I'd do about anything to prove to you what a real sport you were!"

"You don't love him either, do you?" he asked, out of no particular reason, hiding his disappointment.

She laughed. "Love! He's crazy about me—that's enough."

She looked up at him sideways in the hall, her finely penciled brows contracted into sharp thin curves.

"I'm sorry—" She shook his hand perfunctorily, hesitated for a moment, shrugged her shoulders, and ran down the high steps ahead of him, and across the street.

He walked slowly down to his car. He got in without looking across the street, or he might have seen her stop on the threshold of the entrance to Maxim's and turn to watch him. She stood for a moment, biting her lips and twisting her fingers. He noted nothing, fumbling at his gears. The engine was running, he swerved slowly in a sharp curve to avoid the rear of an automobile standing in front of him. A figure sped across the street and he heard something strike his running board.

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“Mr. Comlough!” a woman’s voice. “Drive to the corner, quick! He’s coming! I’ll do it for you!”

“Hold fast!” he said, shooting by the car ahead. Around the corner he stopped.

“No—I guess I can’t let you, at that,” he said. “I have no right to muddle up your life.”

“You can’t stop me now!” she said, opening the door and getting in beside him. “It isn’t as though I was crazy about him,”—she talked rapidly, excitedly,—“but even that couldn’t stop me now. If I didn’t help you—say, I play hunches—why, I could never let a decent white man do me a favor again—see? I feel that way. There’s nothing good or bad you get that you don’t have to pay back good or bad for. I ought to know that. I forgot it, that’s all. Drive some place and tell me what to do. I’m game!”

CHAPTER XIII

AT a quarter to eleven one morning a woman stepped from a maroon town car and passed through the imposing portal of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company. She sent in her card, upon which was engraved in shaded old English, "Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin." Underneath this was written, "Request of Oswald G. Velte." She asked that her card be taken to the vice-president who was in charge of the loan department.

She was the type of woman men turn to gaze after; women, too. She was one of whom it is said that she is gowned or garbed rather than merely dressed. From the tip of the delicate dart in her morsel-like straw turban to the tip of the small needle-pointed black satin pumps—her skirt of Cheruit twill clinging slightly and with the faintest concession to daring in brevity—she was at once physical feminine perfection and allure. Her tight thin black veil gauzing her face, accentuated through its film her beauty, rather than concealed

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it. Men's eyes, after taking in the suave rhythm of her figure, were apt to linger on the tiny embroidered harlequin—the single decoration on her veil—which she wore a little above the right corner of her bow mouth.

Her lips were rouged with art, not emphasis; there was just the necessary quiver in the fine curve of her stenciled eyebrows. Her cheeks, even through the thin black veil, were tinctured with what might have been the healthful flush of outdoors.

A philosopher, seeing her and knowing her, would have deduced from her the generalization that women are artists, creating and everlasting re-creating the unique masterpieces of themselves. In a week Ethel Pearson had done wonders with herself.

There was nothing of Estelle de Courtney left about the desirable woman of refinement who waited for the word to enter Lynn's office. Comlough had told her in a general way the kind of impression she was to make on Lynn; took her to several élite shops; gave her a few suggestions, but permitted her to outfit herself mainly according to her intuition, appreciating the actress and the

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mannequin in her. He had sent her, with a companion who passed as her sister and a maid, to Lakewood, with instructions to stay out in the air all day, and develop a natural substitute for the undue amount of rouge she seemed to believe she required. The day before he had driven to Lakewood and thence with her and the two other women to an appropriate cottage in Allenhurst on the coast. Installed there as Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin and her sister, he had left them and arrived home in time to get Glenn's call. Their conversation was brief.

"Get ready!" he had said to Glenn. "Any day now."

The next day—that morning—she had come to New York as Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin, of Allenhurst, and taken rooms at the Plaza.

She waited in the little anteroom to Lynn's office a few minutes before he came out to her. Oswald G. Velte was an old and valued client of the bank's. Comlough knew him; knew, too, that he was in Europe. There was no doubt about it, however, that Lynn's intense cordiality of greeting, despite his murmured reference to Mr. Velte, was for her rather than for the stumpy old mer-

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chant with mutton-chop whiskers and credit in the Clinton Loan and Trust Company reaching to seven figures.

“Mr. Velte is a very old friend of ours,” she said. “A very old friend. This is Mr. Lynn, I believe. I am Mrs. Shevlin, Mr. Lynn,” she said, repeating what he already knew, as she seated herself easily in the chair drawn up to his desk. She smiled at him through her veil.

A faint gleam of appreciation lighted Lynn’s eyes in response to her smile. He regarded her with a kind of eager passiveness. He was not crude—she saw that instantly.

“Yes—Mrs. Shevlin?” he said quietly.

She seemed to have a little difficulty in stating her errand. A most charming hesitancy; and she seemed to appeal to him for assistance in expression. Being a gentleman, he naturally desired to help her. She saw at once that was her cue—to let him help her, as much as he desired. Very shortly, as she bent closer to him, he seemed to desire greatly. She told him that while she had come on business, she had never meddled with business before. Father always attended to that first, she said, with pretty irrelevancy; then her husband.

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Now her husband was away—and this great opportunity had come. Her husband was away and would not return for—ah, ever so long! And now there was this business to attend to. She sighed and looked at him seriously a moment before she smiled again. He leaned slightly nearer; her husband being away and not likely to return for a long time, and there being this business to attend to which she would now explain, he probably felt he should lean a little nearer. It was oil.

Lynn gave a start, which she did not notice. Her husband was—well—she wished to talk frankly—Mr. Lynn would certainly appreciate her position. Her husband was a globe-trotter. She almost feared he had gone to Africa, she had not heard from him now for—let's see, it was early in April when she got her last letter from him. Then he was in Curaçao. He had mentioned Africa then—in a jesting way; but, she told Lynn this earnestly and with a little bitterness, he thought, which heartened him, you know, he being a man with the so-called male's sense of protecting unprotected women—that her husband could always be relied upon—the only time, evidently—to do

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what he jested about doing. There was nothing to expect from the man when he was serious.

Well, it seems her husband had first mentioned oil investments in Ecuador, and told her to talk to Mr. Velte and a Mr. Ainslee. Mr. Ainslee was now in South America, but he had written her of the wonderful opportunities of the Duryea and Pearce holdings there. She had property and certain negotiable stock, upon which she wished to borrow money. She thought perhaps the bank would give her advice on the value of those oil things in Ecuador and tell her how much to put into them, and whether it was entirely safe. Of course, she had some money—but then everything was so high, and one did want variety now and then—merely to stave off boredom—she looked appealingly at Lynn when she said boredom, as though the bank and he might give her advice in disposing of that, too, in the most gilt-edge manner. So, well, it was desirable to turn money into more money. He understood, did he not? Lynn thought he did, very well. She was bored and lonely. It is a normal masculine inclination to do away with both of these states when a pretty woman requests it. That husband! To

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leave a woman like this alone, and go trapesing off through the world. Africa! Fantastic business! There was something mock heroic about Africa.

He might have told her that it was not the business of a bank to advise its clients upon the nature of their speculations—decidedly not. That upon presentation of proper security a bank would be willing to advance moneys at a respectable rate of interest, and after that had no interest at all in what dispositions were made of those moneys. He might have, but he did nothing of the kind. She was too attractive.

He said it would be a pleasure for him to investigate the character of the Duryea and Pearce holdings. When would she care to come in again? She protested daintily at appropriating his valuable time. He assured her with something like ardor that that was his purpose and reason of being, to devote his time to her—that is, to the bank's customers' interests. Well, then, let her see—she had some shopping to do and some other matters to attend to—but would to-morrow morning be convenient to him? It would.

She went out, telling him first she was staying

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at the Plaza; leaving a faint, seductive scent of perfume in his office.

“Good. Call him up to-morrow and tell him you can’t come. Next day, perhaps,” Comlough said when she gave him the facts of her visit to Lynn.

A few minutes later Comlough went to meet Lynn at luncheon, and they talked of his plans freely, as usual. He made a point of seeing Lynn almost every day. When he had shaken hands in parting from him, he always had the impulse to go and wash his hands.

“Has Brownlow’s plant turned out any more samples?” Comlough asked Glenn vaguely, when the latter called up that night at the appointed time.

“Three more in this afternoon.”

“How are his wares—on the old pattern?”

“Yes.”

“Can you?”

“Can try.”

They understood each other perfectly.

“Go up to our prospect’s home to-night again. Was he in last night?”

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"I passed by and there was a light in his study."

"Keep on your toes," said Comlough.

"I'll do that," said Glenn.

The next afternoon a messenger brought Mrs. Shevlin three sheets of memoranda upon Duryea and Pearce, and other financial suggestions. Also a note expressing sentiments of hope that Mrs. Shevlin was quite well again, and expectant delight at her possible visit to Mr. Lynn's office the next day.

"Go," said Comlough that night. He examined the sheet of oil stock notes carefully. "You remember the names I gave you—DePinna, Magdalena holdings, Porter—Long Horn and Lone Star Railroad, Texcol Oil and Asphalt Corporation, and the rest? Ask him, if an occasion ever seems to make the question absolutely natural, 'What is this company I hear so much of—the United Americas Petroleum Consolidated?' Remember what he says of any of these things if talk of them occurs. Don't bring them up, though. If they just happen—good! Never forget, he's a clever man."

He eyed her carefully, abstractedly, for several

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minutes. She had never been able to break through his detachment. She was a little piqued at his aloofness—her failure to touch him as a being, not a means. She found herself wondering what the other woman could be like—Lynn's wife? Curiously enough, Comlough was thinking of Marcia then, too. He was thinking, what is there in men that can make one of them with the best sort of antecedents, who is bound by every chain of honor and loyalty and even self-interest, turn from a woman like Marcia to a woman like this woman? It wasn't a question of morals at all—merely one of fastidiousness.

"Start drawing back to Allenhurst to-morrow," he said. He looked at her closely, studying her. "Wear your blue silk to-morrow," he said at length.

He left her in the dining-room of Marquette's where they met each day, as upon the first occasion.

"Friday night!" Comlough told Glenn over the wire that evening. It was Tuesday.

Mrs. Shevlin appeared in the office of the vice-president of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company in charge of loans at precisely eleven-thirty the following day. She appeared in blue. She had

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no trouble gaining admittance to Mr. Lynn's office. In fact, the vice-president in charge of loans rather hurriedly got rid of an old and valued client—such as Mr. Velte himself might have been—in order to go out and greet Mrs. Shevlin.

Mrs. Shevlin was easy indeed to look at that morning. A caressingly clinging blue silk gowned her. It was a simple seeming thing, that frock; simple with all the Medean simplicity which all the ingenuity of a French modiste had designed through bitter hours of creative frenzy, in order to hide its real complexity. It moved with her in unrippled pliancy; its folds undulations always, folds and creases never; margining sleeves and vestee, some creamy sheer fragility of delicacy beyond organdie or georgette.

She returned his greeting with such unconscious, spontaneous, unfeigned heartiness.

"Why, it seems we are old friends, Mr. Lynn," she exclaimed, as they sat in his office. "Yours is the only face I have seen twice in New York, I do believe. Oh, so beastly lonely—this town of yours!"

He glowed frankly at her now; inquiring almost anxiously how she felt; expressed his regrets that

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she could not come the day before, and in the counter exchange of courtesies bordering on personalities, it was a drag to get back to oil, particularly as they were leaning toward each other so that he caught the subtle, provocative perfume which hung about her like the daintiest of mists. In fact, they didn't get back to oil. They went to luncheon together.

Just before they went out she said innocently:

“Are you married, too, Mr. Lynn?” with a commiserating loitering on the “too.” It gave him a little start.

At luncheon she made several other casual references to his wife, which Lynn did not relish, but which served to bind him closer to her than if she had not known that he was married. She seemed to be willing to grant that he was a lonely man as she was a lonely woman, and he was willing to let it go at that.

When he returned from luncheon with Mrs. Shevlin, Lynn had somehow become involved—pleasurably so, to be sure—in a drive with her later in the afternoon. He had hardly sat down in front of his desk—the vision of the woman in blue seated across the short white lawn of the

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Waldorf table, still before him—when the telephone rang. It was Marcia. He gave a short start, but gripped himself at once. He was prone to too much of this starting lately!

It was the simplest of wifely greetings, this call of hers. The children were well; they loved it out-of-doors; how was he feeling? she missed him; when would he come out—Saturday or Sunday? He conquered a buzzing excitement in his mind. He couldn't promise ahead—but he would try. Try what?—Why, Saturday, of course!

He went for a long drive with Mrs. Shevlin that afternoon, first working until four o'clock feverishly on some notes which he sent to an obscure broker named Nolan on the shoddy end of Broad Street, and upon two long letters to a man named Courteleyou in Washington, and Kilcairn in St. Louis, and upon a third terse communication to W. R. R. Yerger, who was in Houston. Then he broke a dinner engagement with Comlough, voicing a series of pathetic excuses which brought a bitter smile to Comlough's lips.

He had dinner with Mrs. Shevlin at an inn outside the city, and they parted at her hotel shortly after ten.

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That night: "Call me at one-thirty to-morrow," said Comlough over the wire; "at my office."

"Right," answered Glenn.

"Our prospect is about to leave town for a short time."

"One-thirty, eh?" repeated Glenn.

"One-thirty," repeated Comlough.

The next morning Comlough went with Mrs. Shevlin from Marquette's to that place which is the pride of all New Yorkers, who never go there—the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He took her through the galleries of paintings in something over an hour. He gave her a few simple instructions.

"Lynn's an art dilettante himself," said Comlough; "and what collection he has is closer to him than his waistcoat. Come here with him this afternoon. Don't tell him you 'love art.' Simply take it for granted that he, as a cultured man, is interested in painting, because—well, because you are interested, being a cultured woman. Ask him no questions on art; answer none. Don't gush. Be reserved. Tell him you want to see only three things—that Chardin, that Diaz, and that Winslow

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I showed you. You are never to call a painting a painting, but always 'a thing.' This is what you are to say of each. 'One Chardin—that frying pan and slice of ham—is worth all the Millets in the world!' 'Diaz—there was a philosopher of the brush! He could turn from a tree to a ballet girl without getting them confused!' 'Winslow—I didn't get him, as they say, exactly at first—but now—do you know—well—draw breath here—'you know his Florida things, of course. Do you remember—or can you help remembering—those flamingoes?'

"If he starts on any particular picture strongly agree with reservations. A true art critic is known not by his enthusiasms but by his reservations—remember that. Don't voice your reservations, however. Let him feel you've got a taste of your own merely. Never endorse a whole picture, that's the safest way. Go up to one and pick out some spot or corner. The spot or corner that looks least interesting to you, is a conservative rule. Point to it—stand before it silently—step back and look at it through half-closed eyes and say in a low voice: 'Isn't that an extraordinary bit of color—just that bit there?' Look at it again for a

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minute and turn to him and say: 'But how many paintings are there, really? Paintings, I mean, not just perfect corners or spots on paintings? Whole, completed paintings? How many are there, after all?'''

He soberly instructed her in the jargon and had her repeat it to him. She was an apt mimic of human attitudinizing and a perfect actress for tones. As she stepped back from him and said: "But, Mr. Lynn—after all, how many paintings are there—real things, that is—not just exquisite corners and parts—?" Comlough regarded her gravely.

"And you would have been satisfied with second-rate vaudeville!" he said solemnly. "What a waste!"

"Well," she said, "one always learns. I never thought I'd take a course in fine arts first, though, to get a guy looney about me. Weird stuff!"

"On the contrary, this is the last word in modernity, my dear," said Comlough gently. "This is what is known as esthetic vamping. It is a variant of the old game of understanding, and all the rage now. You really have to suspect every couple that go into an art gallery."

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“Some place!” she murmured as they came out, breathing freer. “You could spend a week in there and not see it all!”

“Spend a week in there!” he exclaimed, astonished. “My dear Miss Pearson, you have been in there an hour and you are now qualified to pass on art.”

Thursday, one-thirty in the afternoon.

“Call me this time to-morrow also,” said Comlough over the wire to Glenn. “Any news?”

“Kirk is a watchman on this plant. He said that he cannot get off to tend to that business between seven and eight in the evening, but after eight he’s free for about an hour or so.”

“Very well, we shall have to accommodate him. I am fairly sure that we won’t want to see him to-morrow night. I am certain our prospect will leave town then. Do you think you will be ready to show me those goods by then?”

“Yes.”

“Call me here in the office at one-thirty to-morrow.”

“Right!”

CHAPTER XIV

FRIDAY morning, in Marquette's.

"He is going to drive to Allenhurst with me this afternoon," she said to Comlough, her eyes glittering. "Right after lunch. It was a cinch. Art did it. Say, he's pretty much of a dog, isn't he? I prefer my vaudeville magnate, at that!" she said with a laugh. "Poor dear, do you think he's lonely way out there in Hollywood—I shall announce to you that he's not!" She looked quizzically at Comlough. "Is Lynn's wife very beautiful?" she asked.

He looked away and then placidly at her. She was quite earnest about the question, not just curious.

"Very," he said quietly.

"I hope you win her," she said, almost in a whisper.

For the first time they went out of Marquette's together. She had to hurry to her engagement with Lynn; he had one with Hargreave. As he

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took her to her taxi a man passing by stopped short and stared at them. He was stumpy and stout. His bushy eyebrows stood out like eaves over bulgy eyeballs—two round colorless eyeballs which had a kind of shrewd absorbent gleam in them. He turned abruptly away and walked on in a roly-poly fashion.

Where had he seen that fellow before? It puzzled Comlough and haunted him intermittently on his way to Hargreave's. As he entered the famous building of the banker's he suddenly recollected. He had passed the little roly-poly man one day on the threshold of Lynn's office—that day of the stolen bag. He was relieved at having placed him.

“We haven't got hold of this fellow Yerger yet,” said Hargreave. “But the figures of that man Courteyou are not to be thought of. Ten millions!”

About the same time that Hargreave was telling Comlough that Courteyou's valuation of Texcol Oil and Asphalt was absurd, a short round man with protruding colorless eyeballs came out of a telephone booth in a Sixth Avenue cigar store, having failed to get Mr. Lynn, of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company, on the wire.

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"In conference with Mr. Vandermeer," the bank telephone operator had informed him. "He will be free in a few minutes."

He was the obscure broker Nolan. He knew Comlough well by sight, although the latter did not know him, and the woman he had just seen coming out of Marquette's with Comlough, he had seen on two occasions recently with Lynn. He was one of the underground grubs of the Street and Curb. For all his distended girth and his roly-poly air he could make faster pace through the mold of intrigue after stray tips, cashable secrets, and financial fodder of one sort and another than the mole through the soil of a cornfield. Something in his instinct for intrigue told him now to inform Lynn that the stunning-looking woman —she was stunning, even Nolan could see that— was a friend of Comlough's. Lynn ought to know that. He had not been able to get Lynn on the telephone, therefore he would complete his business up on Thirty-seventh Street, which would only take a few minutes, go downtown again and tell Lynn personally.

When he came to the bank Lynn had gone.

"Mr. Lynn won't be back until to-mor-

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row or maybe not until Monday," said the attendant.

Something like dismay took hold of Nolan. He roly-polied to his obscure office on the shoddy end of Broad Street. A message from Lynn was waiting for him.

Will call you between seven and eight to-night at Greenpoint. Kilcairn wire R4; R7; R7a. See Courteleyou. In from Washington this afternoon.

It was from Lynn, although signed Yarnall. Nolan lived in Greenpoint. Lynn had recently found it convenient to talk to him there in the evenings. Nolan evidently understood what the submarinish items signified and began to act out orders. He shook his head dubiously. Where was Lynn off to at this time? He didn't like this business of the woman with Comlough and Lynn. He was shrewd enough to see the difference between Comlough and Lynn in regard to women. He thought Lynn ought to know right away that Comlough knew that woman. But he couldn't tell him right away, because he didn't know where he could reach Lynn. However, when he called up between seven and eight that night he'd tell him.

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Nolan, methodical in his obscure way, made a note of it on his pad.

“Tell Y. of wom.,” he wrote down in his rolling handwriting, something like his roly-poly walk.

Just at this time Comlough, who had met Glenn in Whyte’s at two o’clock, was leaning across the table toward his companion.

“To-night at eight, then?” he said.

Glenn nodded.

“It looks easy to you now?” asked Comlough, eyeing him closely.

“I’ve seen the surest tricks fluke,” said Glenn tersely.

“So have I,” agreed Comlough soberly. “If I guessed wrong—if something slips up—there may even be fireworks.”

Glenn met his look steadily, that was all. He was not a talking man. Comlough was heartened by that.

“Don’t forget to get a pair o’ gloves,” was all Glenn said. “Thin silk’s best.”

CHAPTER XV

Two men separated at the corner of Sixty-sixth Street and Fifth Avenue shortly after eight o'clock in the evening. One walked with a loping stride rapidly east on the south side of Sixty-sixth Street. There was a slight bulge over his inner coat pocket. The other man strolled leisurely up Fifth Avenue and east on Sixty-seventh Street. By the time he reached Madison Avenue the first man had twice passed a severe Colonial apartment house on the north side of Sixty-sixth Street next to a finely mannered four-story brick dwelling with marble facing and two entrances. One was a deep, wide New England doorway, with a polished knocker, and threshold on the level of the sidewalk. The other was the servants' entrance, a half dozen steps down, and narrower. The house was dark from top to bottom. Dwelling and apartment house stood midway in the block between Fifth and Madison Avenues.

The second man came down Madison Avenue

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to Sixty-sixth Street, hesitated a moment, and walked west on the north side. An automobile drove up and a man and woman entered the apartment house. He struck briskly and diagonally across the street, and had almost reached Fifth Avenue again when the first man rematerialized out of the shadows on the south side, crossed the street also and quickly entered the apartment house, too.

The second man now sauntered down Fifth Avenue and walked east on Sixty-fifth Street, and presently he came round the block into Sixty-sixth from Madison again. A woman was hastening toward Fifth Avenue. Otherwise the street was dark, dignified, and deserted. As he strolled west on the north side, just in front of the residence beside the apartment house his shoe-string must evidently have become untied, because he bent over as though to tie it. A thin sliver of light marked the threshold of the big white door just for a moment. He suddenly straightened and in three steps was in the spacious shade of the portal. He pushed slightly against it. It gave noiselessly to his pressure. The next instant he was inside. The door shut silently behind him. Someone gripped his arm.

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"Come back a bit—we don't want to use any light here."

"Anybody see you next door?"

"No. Hopped the fence—a cinch."

They came to a stairway. Comlough took the electric torch from Glenn and shot a peg of light on it.

"Up!" he whispered.

As they reached the top he gave a slight start. The Sevres clock in the music-room chimed once for eight-thirty. Half a hundred miles away, in the house of Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin in Allenhurst, New Jersey, the vice-president of the Clinton Loan and Trust Company in charge of loans was just hanging up a telephone receiver, after a short conversation with a gentlemen in Greenpoint, Kings County or Greater New York, named Nolan. It had taken him almost an hour to get Mr. Nolan on the wire; less than a twentieth part of it to conclude his conversation with him. The sharp feminine ears in the next room trained on Lynn's part of the conversation heard little more than: "Yes—yes—no—no! Is that so?" He never held himself better in hand than in the first thirty seconds of that conversation.

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“Nolan?” he had said.

“Yes—Mr. Yarnall?” answer. In Greenpoint, Kings County, Nolan was looking at a pad in front of him.

“Mr. Yarnall, first I want to tip you off about something funny,” he had said. “Where are you?” he suddenly asked.

“Out of town with some friends.—Yes?”

“You know the other day I saw a woman coming out of your office.”

Oddly something in Lynn’s chest tightened.

“Yes?” he forced himself to say indifferently.

“She was a pippin!” volunteered Mr. Nolan gratuitously.

“Yes?” coldly.

“Well—this noon I saw her coming out of a place on Thirty-eighth Street with Comlough.”

For a second Lynn did not answer. He was staring into a blindly dazzling spot ahead.

“Are you sure?” he asked slowly, steadily.

“Sure—say, d’ye think I’d ever mistake her?—More’n that, I went up there late this afternoon and inquired, and she’s been meeting him there about every day.”

Lynn was still staring fixedly ahead, but the

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dazzling spot had formed into a shining steel sphere about three feet in diameter, mounted on a solid iron base in his study.

"Thought I'd pass it on to you for what it was worth," Nolan said.

"Certainly—thanks." He focused his attention nearer. "About that R4—what's the news about that?" he forced himself to say.

There had followed a lot of unheard talk from Nolan, punctuated by curt, meaningless monosyllables and terse, meaningless phrases from Lynn. He had hung up the receiver. Far away in his music-room the Sèvres clock was chiming once for half-past eight. For a moment he stood motionless, getting a grip on himself. He still saw his gleaming steel ball of a safe in front of him. He walked leisurely into the other room where Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin, reclining lazily in a deep soft chair by the unlighted fireplace, looked enticingly up at him. He rubbed his hands with a quiet air of satisfaction.

"Now," said Lynn patteringily, "that's settled! Nothing, as they say in the Street when a lamb has been shorn, to do until the bear season opens."

"Sounds frightfully technical," she crooned.

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He lowered himself luxuriously into another deep soft chair opposite Mrs. Shevlin, crossing his long legs and smiling contentedly at her. He clamped his hand suddenly to his side, as though he had a pain, and sat bolt upright.

“Oh, rot!” he muttered angrily. “Not a cigar! Cigars, of course, you haven’t got, Mrs. Shevlin?” he asked hopefully, gazing across at the small table on which stood an alabaster box filled with gold-lettered cigarettes.

Mrs. Shevlin looked her regrets, a little taken back.

“So—sorry, Mr. Lynn! I thought you smoked only cigarettes?”

“Not—not in the evening. Well, that’s something we’ve got to correct instanter. Care to walk down to the village with me?”

She smiled up at him languidly.

“Take the car—I’ll be here when you come back—I won’t run away from you,” she purred coyly.

“But I might from you,” he said.

Her eyes went sleepily up to his.

“Not a chance!” they said.

“Wicked, wicked Mr. Lynn even to say such a thing!” her lips reproved insinuatingly.

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He bent over her, touching her shoulder lightly.

“Call me Evans!” he said. For a moment he stood bending over her, his face close to hers. He straightened abruptly and went out to get her car, and his cigars.

Unfortunately in his comprehensive instructions to her Comlough had failed to mention this now important trifle. Lynn never smoked cigars, day or night.

He reached the railroad station in her car at 8:43. In three minutes a train for New York was due.

And now that profound perversity of luck which sticks deranging fingers into men's affairs and railroad schedules hit Lynn hard. Word came down the line from Bradley Beach that there had been an accident and the road was tied up. He felt a chill, despite the warm May night. The safe was still before his eyes. But his nerve held. He could make New York in three and a half or four hours in the automobile, he thought. Fortunately he knew the roads. But he could not leave his house unguarded that long.

He telephoned to Hempstead. He was lucky in getting the connection quickly, too. Marcia

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answered. Her voice steadied him, and then for the first time in his life Evans Lynn, like many another man who has dropped the gold of life to pick up the brass, was struck with a sudden sense of irremediable loss. He belonged to that extensive class of persons who never really understand any act of their own until they see the consequences of it.

"Send Martin to the house with the roadster," he said to Marcia. "Tell him to wait inside for me. Send him right away—dear!"

She asked him if anything was wrong. No, he replied curtly, for the second time in his life at least unable to weave explanatory plausibilities—that ridiculous stall about the cigars haunted him. But always the picture of his safe put sand on his acquired glibness. He repeated simply that Martin should bring the keys and let himself into the house at once. He wanted someone in the house as soon as possible. He hung up and went out to the automobile. Irony! He was about to get into the car when a far whistle sounded through the lovely May night and down the line, its sardonic eye seemingly cognizant of the harrowing trick it had played on him, came the New York

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train! Savagely regretting having called up Marcia, he left Mrs. Shevlin's automobile unceremoniously standing, and boarded the train, which should bring him to New York at about eleven.

CHAPTER XVI

COMLOUGH and Glenn worked round to the stairway leading to the second floor, the flashlight slapping its blue-grey shaft at the darkness.

“Up!” said Comlough.

They reached the third landing.

“Almost there,” he whispered. He had no definite sensations. He was like a cool supercrust holding down a whole spasm of them. As they made their way through rooms the sudden soft flashings of the torch seemed to cast magic-lantern disks of revelation on grotesquely familiar surroundings. He had a sense of tingling—almost pleasurable—a sense of getting to an objective through danger. They crossed the soft library carpet and pushed through the portières into the room adjoining Lynn’s study. The door of the study was closed. Comlough cast the torchlight on the knob.

“Wait a minute there!” said Glenn, as he was about to grip the knob. “I’ve seen this fellow

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before. He's got an alarm detachment there." He took the light from Comlough. "I thought so," he said after examining it closely. "He's prob'ly got his safe alarm and his current on the same line. Wait here."

He moved away softly, the flashes of the torch against the carpet indicating his whereabouts until he passed through the door and out into the hall. He was gone a long time, it seemed to Comlough. He could not detect the faintest sound of him. Through the silence and darkness from far below came nine silvery, diminutive chimes. A moment later a grey fan of light protruded beyond the black edge of the open door to the hallway, and Glenn was beside him again.

"All right, let's go!" he whispered.

He passed the dark torch to Comlough and occupied himself with the lock in the utter darkness. Comlough heard a faint scratching and ticking of metal on metal. Two minutes could not have gone by, and the door was open.

"Throw the flash on the floor—close to it!" Glenn said. Comlough did so. "That it?" Comlough saw his arm extend like a huge block of shadow toward a dull gleaming globe.

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“Yes.”

“Put out the light!” Comlough did so, wonderingly. “He left the blinds and a window up. I’ll fix it.”

“Time doesn’t enter into this,” said Comlough. “You can go slow and careful—we’ve got ten hours anyhow.”

“I found it a helluva good rule myself to get a job done and to get away,” answered Glenn.

He was over by the windows the next moment, doing something, Comlough could not see or hear what; wending among the unaccustomed surroundings with a sureness that Comlough, for all his own acquaintance with the place, could never have duplicated. In fact, what chiefly struck Comlough was his fundamental ignorance of these familiar rooms—the incredible strangeness of them now.

Suddenly a circle of light struck brightly on the grey rug in the center of the study. Through it shone the steel ball of the safe. Glenn had brought Lynn’s conical desk-lamp down to the floor. He took off his coat, extracting a slender bundle of tools wrapped in a blue felt cloth from the inside pocket. He laid the coat carefully before the safe and knelt on it. He patted his gloved fingers, took

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a watchmaker's lens out of a waistcoat pocket and screwed it into his right eye. Slowly and delicately he ran a small, pointed tool over the smooth convexity of steel. His fingers—those fingers of his with eyes in them—even through his gloves seemed arched in a kind of palpitating sensitiveness over the tool. His head was tilted backward, looking at the ceiling. In the reflection of the light from the floor he resembled some Indian seer exploring the feel of a great crystal before losing his gaze in it. He rose and tapped over the whole exposed surface of the safe. He took the torch from Comlough and explored it again with eye and tool. Comlough watched him, fascinated.

"Some nut!" said Glenn softly, appreciatingly.

"Can you do it?" Comlough asked, anxiously.

Glenn did not answer. He followed the hairline of the circular door. Then he took a metal rod about a foot long from the bundle and gently tapped the safe along the line of its opening, and about the disk and the levers. Slowly and painstakingly he turned the disk, listening to it. He took out a stethoscope, attached it to his ears and again listened to the tumblers. In the shadows his face took on a mysterious, profound raptness, like

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that of some mystical worshiper in an Oriental grotto. About all his movements there was a deft, perfect poise—a marvelous coördination of purpose and method.

Minute after minute went by, as with a chilled meticulousness Glenn, that Mac McDevitt, the Tiger with Mystic Fingers of police calendars of bygone days, whirled the disk, listened, tapped, reset the disk, whirled again—now tentatively, now confidently, now testingly, doubtfully now; confidently again and expectantly—now unexpectedly. Minute after minute passing, as he paused to tap and to listen, unhurried always, but always nevertheless imparting a sense of swiftness. Minute after minute, and the safe continued to stand mockingly solid, intact, shut.

Downstairs the little Sèvres clock sent up to them its faint tinkle of nine-thirty, ten, ten-thirty. Comlough held himself rigid. His body ached with the strain of it. His spirit grappled with impatience.

“Some nut!” repeated Glenn softly once, sitting down for a moment and wiping his forehead and neck. “The gloves’ll have to come off,” he said slowly, gloomily.

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He cleaned his fingers carefully with a fresh handkerchief and gently rubbed a few drops of a fluid from a tiny yellow phial on them. He rose, stretched himself, and waggled his hands loosely from his wrists. He knelt before the safe again.

Suddenly at the end of a series of faint whirlings and clickings a slightly louder, victorious click sounded in the room with the effect of a shot. A circle of the surface rose, lifting a pillar of shadow with it, about two inches, with a winding motion as though unscrewing itself. Comlough leaned forward, his pulse banging. A moment later, as though no mystery of steel could hide its secrets longer from him, Glenn, again wearing gloves, had turned the circle of the surface on its invisible hinge as Lynn had done. The blank wall of copper stretched across the opening.

The Sèvres clock downstairs chimed eleven as he slid the copper door apart, after repeatedly manipulating the levers and the disk and one of the hinging pins. The individual disks to the compartment locks were child's play to him now. He had them open, every one, within five minutes.

Comlough straightened himself with a great intake of breath. It seemed he had not breathed

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for hours. Glenn calmly tied his tools in the blue cloth, stuffed them into the inside pocket of his coat, and stood up. He mopped away the miniature beads of perspiration from his face, and slowly put on his coat. Then painstakingly he examined the floor about the safe and satisfied himself that he had left neither mark nor thing, and carefully wiped the surface of the safe with his handkerchief, moistened by several drops of the fluid. Turning, he clasped the hand Comlough held toward him without a word.

“Any more use for me?” he asked finally.

“None,” said Comlough.

“Good-night,” he said, as though they were separating at the corner of Broadway and Forty-second Street at midday.

“Good-night, Joe,” said Comlough.

Noiselessly he went; noiselessly, like a tiger in a strange jungle which a certain super-feline instinct makes as familiar to him as his own hunting grounds, Glenn drifted through the dark reaches of Lynn’s home and out into the open night.

Comlough searched through the main and center compartment of the safe first. It contained a collection of deeds, mortgages, documents of

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sundry legal and propertied aspect. Nothing pertaining to oil. One by one he went through the compartments, and one by one the papers they contained. And one by one he found the things he was looking for.

There was a memorandum of five loans Lynn had recently issued at the bank, ranging in sums from \$150,000 to \$630,000 to borrowers named W. R. R. Yerger, Timothy Kilcairn, Oliver Hill Courtelyou, W. R. R. Yerger, and Horace Miller. There were notes, letters, documents, deeds, guarantees, ownership papers, stock certificates, telegrams—everything—relating to and comprising Magdalena River leases and concessions, Lone Star Railroad, Maracaibo Lake Basin properties, Texan Improvement and Petroleum Corporation, Utopian Oil Corporation. Things and information invaluable enough to him, Comlough found, as he fluttered his way through compartment after compartment of that safe, each adding another chapter to the story of the secret intent of the man he had saved, who had sworn to help him in any hour of need, who had undermined him. Most of the things he came upon he merely glanced at and tossed upon the growing pile beside the

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safe, casually, with no emotions whatever. Now and again something came to hand which hurt. For example, references to matters he had divulged to Lynn incorporated in letters written to the latter's assistants, copies of which Lynn had kept. Actually quoting him in several instances. The most recent only a few days before, when Lynn, imagining him still in the dark about the bag and knowing him to be still agonized over his loss, had pumped him, as he believed, at luncheon, and written Courteleyou immediately thereafter:

C. just told me C. M. [Colonel Maurice] would certainly go as steep as \$7,500,000. Hold to \$10,000,-000 until Monday morning. But by 2 P.M. Monday we must have sold. Every day is going to make it riskier for us to hold on.

Monday! But it was in the last compartment of all that he found something which gave him a real start. It was a map which had been torn into small pieces and fitted together like a jigsaw puzzle, and then mounted on tough bookbinding linen.

It was the sketch of the Estacado which he had made for Lynn that night here in this room—on Lynn's desk: made, explained, torn up, and thrown

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into the wastepaper basket. And Lynn had gathered up the pieces out of the basket—after he had come home with the contents of Comlough's bag, probably—no, it must have been in those minutes he was out of the room presumably instructing Timmins to call Ralston and have Ochia bring the bag to the station. Somehow, that little patched-together sketch hurt Comlough more deeply than all the rest of the evidence of Lynn's treachery.

Assuring himself that there was nothing which he had overlooked, he stacked the pile beside the safe neatly, for a moment studying it with a kind of absent intentness—so intent that—

“Hello!” a voice said in the silence.

He clutched the papers, whirled round and sprang to his feet, and faced—standing in the doorway—Lynn!

Lynn was white—so white that his face stood out like a tombstone in the moonlight in the semi-darkness. Curiously it was not the fact that Comlough had found what he had found, but that someone could have opened his safe, obviously without violence, that had shaken Lynn as nothing had ever shaken him before. He pushed his hands into his pockets and strolled toward Comlough.

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“You do the impossible!” he said. “This must be an old profession of yours.”

Comlough straightened the papers in his hands, put them under his arm, reached down, picked up the lamp and set it back upon the desk. No need for semi-darkness longer. He walked over and turned on the corner ceiling lights.

“I’m no piker,” he admitted then. “You find me at the end of a perfect day, my old friend; a considerable job rather neatly disposed of—not in a hotel room looting a bag snatched from a Jap in a railroad station.”

CHAPTER XVII

LYNN sat down, his fingers convulsively clasping the arms of the chair. His voice was quite steady. The iron nerve—infinitely more iron than on that night when he had come to Comlough for help—the nerve which had carried him out of Allenhurst and the smiles of Mrs. Shevlin, still held him up.

“No,” continued Comlough easily, as though Lynn had spoken again, “you mustn’t speak lightly of our profession. It’s an old one. We at the top of it never knife our friends in the back.”

He held out the pieced-together map which he had drawn for Lynn. Lynn waved it wearily away, tearing with perceptible effort his hands from the armrests of his chair, and then clasping them under his chin. Curiously, a great part of Comlough’s positive feelings in regard to Lynn had passed; replaced by the negative ones of cold contempt, loathing so great that it was almost indifference. He had accomplished his mission. It was all over, on that side.

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"I didn't expect to see you to-night," he said slowly.

"No. I suppose your lady operative is just about wondering now whether you do," said Lynn, almost absently.

"However, as you are here——"

"No—no! No talking," said Lynn, with a tired wave of his hand. "No talking. What do you want to do?"

Comlough regarded him curiously for a moment. Lynn made no attempt to evade his eyes. Comlough thought he had never seen anyone so utterly fatigued.

"This," he said. He went to the desk and wrote. "A transference of all this back to me."

"I lose!" said Lynn quietly.

"Honor, self-respect, every claim to decency, everything in God's world worth a man's while to fight for. Yes—you lose!"

Lynn's lips drew together straight. He rose.

"Oh, hell, Comlough—why take yourself so damned seriously! Because I wasn't grateful? Stop fooling yourself. You know you didn't help me out in the first instance for my sake—you did it for Marcia. Marcia and you——"

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Lynn stopped. Comlough had very lightly grasped his elbow; but it was his eyes with their sudden mysterious absence of all expressiveness which really silenced Lynn.

“I wouldn’t say anything more, if I were you,” he said. “I believe the customary procedure after that type of innuendo is one of the major forms of assault; but to show you I don’t take myself too damned seriously, after all—well, it’s not worth discussing, is it? We have had altogether twenty-odd years of friendship. It shows how little one can learn of a man in a lifetime if one has a talent for not learning. I don’t suppose pounding you into pulp now would make up for my own lack of perception in the past.”

He stood aside and motioned Lynn to the desk. Lynn sat down behind it and picked up a pen. He dipped it into the inkwell and slowly tried the wet nib on a pad. He shot a covert glance at Comlough. He reached down at one side of the desk and opened a drawer. The next moment he was standing behind the desk. His right arm was extended at Comlough. In his hand was a squat-nosed automatic.

“Give it all up—*now?* You came in here to

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crack my safe—it was dark—I shot—I killed you!" he said excitedly, his eyes blazing with the insane fascination of a way out. "Killed you—see! Swear to me you'll drop all this—swear you'll leave it all the way it is, and I won't shoot! Swear—swear!"

Comlough looked Lynn in the eyes.

"Lynn!" he said quietly. "Lynn, you're pointing that gun in the wrong direction."

The other's arm grew taut, and the automatic began to waver in an unsteady grip.

"Oh!" said Lynn softly. "Oh!" He shook his head as though to free it from some cobwebby entanglement. "No—of course not. You wouldn't knuckle under. . . . Oh!" he repeated softly, and sat down.

His words and the intensity of his insane glare alike seemed to wander off into space. The revolver drooped in his fingers; he raised it with an effort and dropped it on the desk-pad in front of him, and his head fell forward in his hands. He sat there—his arms propped on his elbows, his head in his hands—for some profound, stark minutes. Downstairs the little Sèvres clock chimed midnight.

All his life Comlough was to hear that clock—

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those elfin drifting chimes winging through the dark spaciousness of the house. The thought trailed through his mind, as he grew conscious of its chiming now, that he had not missed one of its hourly or half-hourly tinklings since half-past eight. Dainty echoes of its midnight call sounded for several minutes in his ears, and as he watched the cowed figure of the man who had been his friend, Lynn raised his head. He was not looking at Comlough; he was staring straight ahead, vacantly, as though the full force of his vision were straining inward.

“You do love Marcia—you do—don’t you?” Lynn asked.

Comlough started. But in Lynn’s voice now had crept a solemn although fantastic earnestness which took out of the question every possible innuendo of stricture or judgment. It was just—a question; just, at the same time, an icy statement of a fact. “Don’t you?” he repeated.

In his heart something like the following leaped up in answer:

“Love her? Of course I love her! All my life I loved her—and lived as though she loved me!” But with his lips Comlough said nothing.

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Lynn, glaring straight ahead, gave an almost imperceptible nod—like a faint, quickly checked start.

“Life—ugh! it’s hell, eh, what!” he said slowly. He rose. As he did so the fingers of his right hand came in contact with the revolver. They curled about it. He picked it up and then thrust both hands deep into his coat pockets. He took his left hand suddenly out again and leveled it at Comlough, pointing stabbingly at his breast. He took a step nearer.

“I can read you, Comlough, to the deepest recesses of your heart!” he shouted. “If I saw just a fleck of sanctimoniousness or pity for me there, I could shoot you! I see you through and through, Comlough! Love her? Of course you love her! All your life you have loved her, and lived as though she loved you—perhaps she did! Lived at least as though you were bound together by your honor, if not by her love!”

Comlough started at the clairvoyance in his eyes and words.

“And now you’re going after what you missed, because you earned it—earned it by integrity, by self-respect, by years of the desolation of lacking

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her!" Lynn threw back his head and laughed wildly, tapping his chest with his fingers.

"Life—oh, it's hell—hell! God, the fool madness of it! You go round the world straight up and clean with the thought of her, a thousand miles from her; and I—alongside her—with her always—go trailing through the muck!"

His head fell until his chin rested almost on his chest. He swayed a little. His voice sank into a hoarse whisper.

"I'd hate to look into a mirror this minute. Any minute!—And you can't dodge mirrors all your life, can you?"

He pulled himself together and abruptly sank down behind his desk again and began to write. He wrote feverishly for perhaps ten minutes. He finished and read over what he had written; rose again and gave several sheets to Comlough.

"There—there's the whole business. Your leases and options, holdings, stocks, plans, hopes and dreams and everything!" he said wearily. His head again fell, as though he held it up only by frightful effort. "Oh, God—the mess of it!" he muttered. "Marcia——!"

Again he swayed a little. Comlough thought he

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would fall. But the next moment he straightened bolt upright. He had heard it before Comlough. Downstairs a door slammed. Footsteps sounded. A voice that caught both men round the breast arrowed up through the dark corridor spaces to them.

“Evans! Evans—!” called Marcia. “Are you upstairs?”

Comlough saw Lynn’s right hand grow rigid within his coat pocket.

“Tell her—tell her everything!” he whispered fiercely at Comlough. “Tell her—*everything!*”

He turned and was out of the room before Comlough could stir.

“Evans!” again her call—nearer.

He crammed the writing Lynn had given him into his pocket, and the papers he had taken from the safe into one of the desk drawers, and went to the door.

“Up here—! It’s I, Marcia—Cooper!” he called.

She came hurriedly in, breathing rapidly, undoing a veil.

“What is it?—Evans telephoned. Something is wrong—I could tell it in his voice. Martin and

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I rushed here, but we had a breakdown. What is it, Cooper?"

From a distant room came a single muffled knock, like a hammer driving short and viciously against a board wrapped in a blanket. The blood ebbed out of her cheeks. He felt his own pulse falter, and cold lay on his spine.

"Wait here, Marcia!" he commanded, and rushed out of the room.

He had the electric torch, but in spite of it he stumbled against furniture and over rugs in his dash in the direction whence that one vicious short bang had come. Eventually he reached Lynn's bedroom. A pencil of light lay under the door.

He got in. Lynn was lying face down across his bed. Beside him on the floor was a litter of torn papers. In that desperate instant, even, Comlough saw the blue shreds of a note in the handwriting of Ethel Pearson—the handwriting of Mrs. Roger Warren Shevlin. And other feminine handwriting. Torn bits of a photograph. Hardly knowing why he did it, he stooped and hurriedly gathered up blue bits and photograph bits and the rest and thrust them into his pocket. And then he saw a piece of white paper with something

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written on it, lying beside Lynn on the bed, held down by Lynn's uncovered fountain-pen. He picked it up. It read:

Last will and testament of Evans Sargent Lynn:
I leave the muddle of my affairs to Cooper Comlough,
Esq.

“Oh!” he heard behind him. “Oh!” repeated Marcia, as she brushed by him and sank on the bed beside Lynn.

CHAPTER XVIII

“TELL her everything!”

He had intended to do so before Lynn gave his command. Even as he came to Lynn’s room and saw him lying on the bed, explanatory words to her framed themselves in his mind—words tempered with a certain appropriateness to the events. There is a spectator side to all men; a misnamed spectator side which imagines the rôle it would act in given circumstances and goes through with an unseen succession of heroic gestures and straightforward speaking even while the visible actor falters through generally in no heroic fashion whatever.

“Marcia,” he had dramatized himself as saying, looking at his hands, hardly daring to look into her eyes, “what I am going to say now is dangerous, perhaps, at this moment; but I cannot play the hypocrite in funereal airs when I really feel as though a pool of bitterness was seeping out from within me, and letting daylight and sunlight

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in again." He imaginatively waved his hand in the direction of the room in which Lynn was lying—for somehow he pictured the conversation taking place in the study. "The danger is that when a man or woman wishes not to be paltry or narrow or false; when a man or woman wishes calmly to regard things broadly and without mentally side-stepping legitimate personal considerations—refusing to be switched from what they believe to be the right road—why, the danger is that it may mean only that the man or the woman has become selfish, blind, callous. Therefore, I am going to give myself and you time to judge of these personal considerations. I do not think that he,"—he had paused in his imagination and again made a slight gesture toward the room where Lynn lay,— "matters. I think what he has just done settles things as far as he is concerned. He was my friend—my best friend once, and yet now I am broad enough to say that what he has just done was the best thing he could have done. I do not think I am callous to feel that way. Nevertheless, I am going to give us time to think it all out. I have waited so long, Marcia, it will not seem too hard to wait a while longer. When May swings

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round again with the full swing of spring and lots of roses and a new sort of life, I am coming back, Marcia. I shall settle things up here; get this end of United Americas straightened out, and then I am going out to the fields to get things started in the way I have dreamed of starting them. And then—when May swings round again—I am coming back!"

So the arrogant spectator within him. But they had not been in Lynn's study, but there together in Lynn's bedroom. The sentimental, rhetorizing heroics of the spectator Comlough had fallen before the simple instincts of actual man—before the brutal reality that there on the bed lay the man who had been his friend.

"I leave the muddle of my affairs to Cooper Comlough!"

Comlough looked out of the train window at the delicate etcher's dusk of the New Jersey meadows.

It was May again, come round with the full swing of spring and lots of apple-blossoms and a new sort of life, in truth. They had left Manhattan Transfer and in a few minutes would plunge into

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the tube and moments later he would be in the signorial station.

He was neither glad nor sorry he had acted as he had acted—it was simply impossible for him to have done otherwise. He had not told her everything—he never would.

Ethel Pearson was on the stage now. He had seen to it that she had obtained her real chance at last. Marcia would never learn from her. Glenn had been in Texas and South America with him during the past year, and was in Mexico now. Out of that taciturn being no hint would ever come to Marcia of what had taken place in her home that night. Yet, oddly enough, he had kept those things from her not for her sake, but actually for Lynn's sake. That was strange. Feeling neither good nor otherwise about it he had thought of it many times. One or two looks she had given him; one or two inflections of her speech had almost led him to believe, at times, when he thought it over, that she surmised a great deal of the truth connected with Lynn's suicide. But why had he been so solicitous about Lynn's reputation after his death? Old association, perhaps. The tradition of the race, perhaps—"Of the dead ye shall speak

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no evil!"—except that he had never been one to respect traditions when they failed to match up with his sense of fitness, or justice, or truth. He had smoothed out the muddle of Lynn's affairs: protected those loans from the bank; protected Marcia's interests and the children's.

The train dived into the tube. Five minutes later he was shaking both her hands at the top of the stairs leading from the tracks, where she had waited for him.

The same Marcia, and yet never the same! His dreams of her never somehow achieved the miraculous reality of her. There had been times in his life when he could not keep inner fires from suddenly splashing their lights into his eyes when he looked at her. This was one of them.

Her quiet woman's beauty, infinitely more appealing to him now than the beauty of her girlhood; her clear skin; the wise humor of her eyes; the exquisite simplicity of her garb, which symbolized so feately the simple exquisiteness of her spirit! Fresh and cool, valiant and wise; endowed with unerring perceptions, gifted with a sort of understanding grace of mind—the same and yet a different Marcia gave him both her hands without

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a word, merely a straight, long look. Somehow at that moment, in a flash of rare insight, he had a sense of her loneliness with Lynn; shut out from the real life of her husband. Lynn had been essentially a secretive man, rather than an aloof one.

Ochia had come to New York with him and was already on the way home with the baggage. Little fear that ever again a bag would be stolen from him. Ochia now traveled armed with the exact change to meet any emergency.

Comlough drove with her to the house on Sixty-sixth Street.

He had felt through the last eight months in South America and the southwest that the instant he saw her again he must involuntarily tell her what he had dreamed of daytimes amidst the strenuous going forward of his projects, and thought of at night when he lay awake. Night thoughts and day dreams! They had even been stronger—those thoughts of the night and dreams of the day unconnected with his schemes—because they had not kept him from pushing on in his work with a holy—unholy—zeal. But now no such words came to tell her. No mention had he ever made of the thing he had come back to tell her. He felt that

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she knew. She must know. He had felt that. And now he was not so sure.

Again, as on that eventful May night twelve months before, he went with her to the children's room when they dallied bedwards after dinner. He came back to the library first, where she rejoined him.

"And now," she said, gravely smiling, "about your work. Tell me about it."

He told her then—the thing he wanted most to tell her right behind his words, straining to get into speech. He told her of his railroading; the Red Basin Dam; the men he had collected—he touched the romance of railroads, supply, shops, electric plants, labor, water, drilling, storing—all the preparations for handling a product which is of greater intrinsic worth than the output of all the minerals from gold and silver to platinum—a product with over three hundred by-products.

"It is fine, Cooper—utterly fine!" she said once.

Gradually, as he talked, there rose before Marcia's eyes his visible dream of bigness and order, purpose, vision achieved and service down there beside riverbank and on the range, through sand and rock, with men and life. Like an in-

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effable peace, the solace of her understanding wrapped round him. Simply and naturally at last he took her hand.

“Marcia—come with me, Marcia! Help me. It is big—this giving warmth and light and power to men, helping them to move from corner to corner of the world, making existence easier and pleasanter by what we do. Doing all this not for ourselves, but for strangers really. We’re in a new time, and we’ll practice what people are preaching—coōperation. We’ll let in the world on the ground floor of our prosperity, from the heads to the hunkies digging the ditches that our pipes are going to lie in—the hobos and tramps and outlaws and dips and riffraff that filter down through the Panhandle looking for a truck-driving job and getting it—we’re going to let them all in, Marcia, because men must get something more out of our dreams than their wages. God grant you and I can do our little bit to help ease the tension of the world; to blunt the edge of hate and take a bit of the sharpness out of the bitterness in men.

“Sometimes I think the war—four years of massacre and hell—has gone for nothing! God—think of that! All that red hell passing over us

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and at the end of it we haven't even been in purgatory! It was force within the law—legalized might, that ran things before 1914. Now its de-legalized force. Was our law all wrong—too narrow?—or what? Was it too loose, and will it have to be tightened? But the world must be let in on the good things—the world and the crowd, because we'll have to let them in before they get us on our backs and take what they want, which will be all we have and more—and if that happens—it will do none of us any good—them least of all.

“So I want you to help me. Not to help me—to work with me. To work for yourself with me. I want to give you everything imaginable—you and the children. And I know there's nothing I can give you equal to a decent deal to the world; a trial at helping the old earth to adjust itself to a sensible, forward-looking program, in which brains and muscles, energy and genius, family and new stock, ditch-diggers and Union Leaguers, Yucatan huskies and Fifth Avenue, can make some kind of dim start toward getting together.”

She drew her hand gently from his. She went to the big high window in the corner and half parted the hangings, and looked out into her own heart,

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not out into the dark street. He came and stood beside her.

"All my life, dear, I seemed to have been striving for you," he said softly. "Always wanting you, reverencing you, loving you, Marcia, above everything else in the world—the fineness, the beauty, the rightness of you. It is all crude and raw out there still, but work is pushing on. Come with me, Marcia—lovers always, but friends and pals, too!"

She turned from the window. Her face was half in shadow, but encircled with the violet gold light of the tall floor lamp. She put her hands on his shoulders, and came close to him.

"Dear—dear!" she whispered, and as he drew her still closer in his arms, she spoke as though passing an unconscious comment on the past. "I have been so lonely, Cooper! So alone, in a way, even with the children, that—oh, my dear!—it seems now I am coming into the world at last!"

THE END

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